NEW

# HISTORY OF NAZI GERMANY

## THE **POWER** AND **POLICIES** BEHIND **HITLER'S** STATE

**Digital** Edition

FUTURE

THIRD EDITION

REARMING FOR WAR ✠ **HITLER YOUTH** ✠ RALLIES & SPEECHES

HISTORY OF

# NAZI GERMANY

## THE **POWER** AND **POLICIES** BEHIND **HITLER'S** STATE

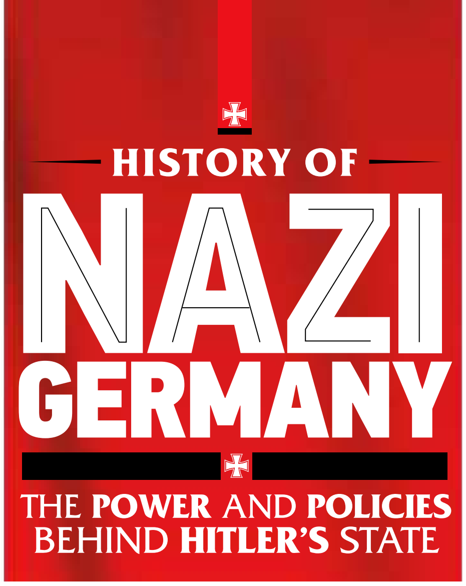
The ascension of the Nazi Party from fringe fanatics to the undisputed rulers of a mighty Germany was a blood-soaked march that seized the lives and minds of a generation and bent them towards war.

Commandeered by an ambitious young loner by the name of Adolf Hitler, the National Socialist German Workers' Party finally achieved its ambitions of power in 1933 and immediately set about rearming a recovering Germany for what would be the greatest conflict in history while excluding the 'undesirables' within the population it sought to completely control.

From ostracising and then murdering Jews to destroying all political opposition and indoctrinating the nation's children via the Hitler Youth and League of German Girls, the Nazis enforced their will via cunning propaganda and the ruthlessness of the Gestapo.

This bookazine will delve into the dark roots of the Nazis before exploring their stunning grab for power and the effects of their brutal policies on the German state, which ultimately created a nation that reflected the racial and social beliefs of one of history's most hated figures.

FUTURE



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NAZI
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THE POWER AND POLICIES
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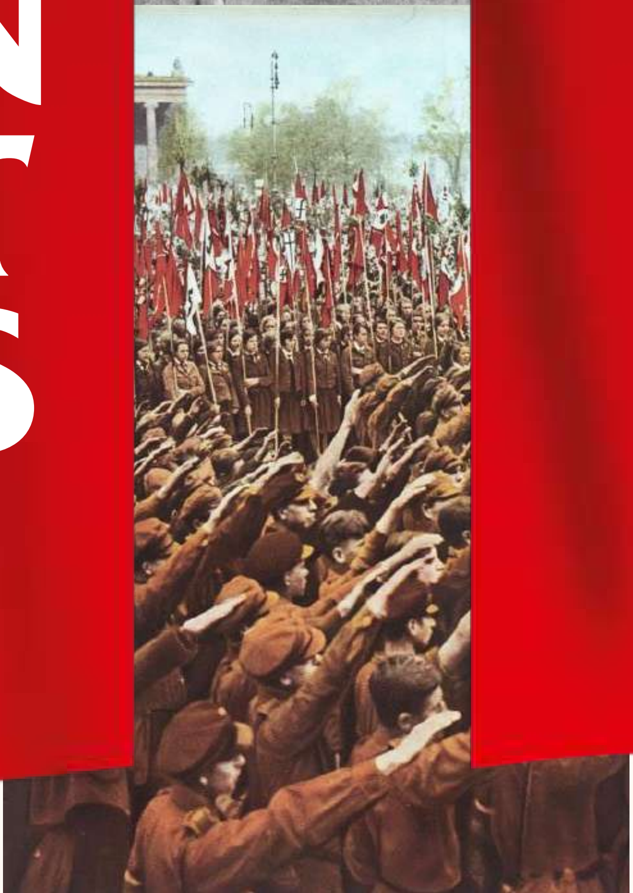

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eind sieht Dein
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# RISE OF THE NAZIS

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ARBEITERPARTEI
STURM

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Der
Schönste ... grö...
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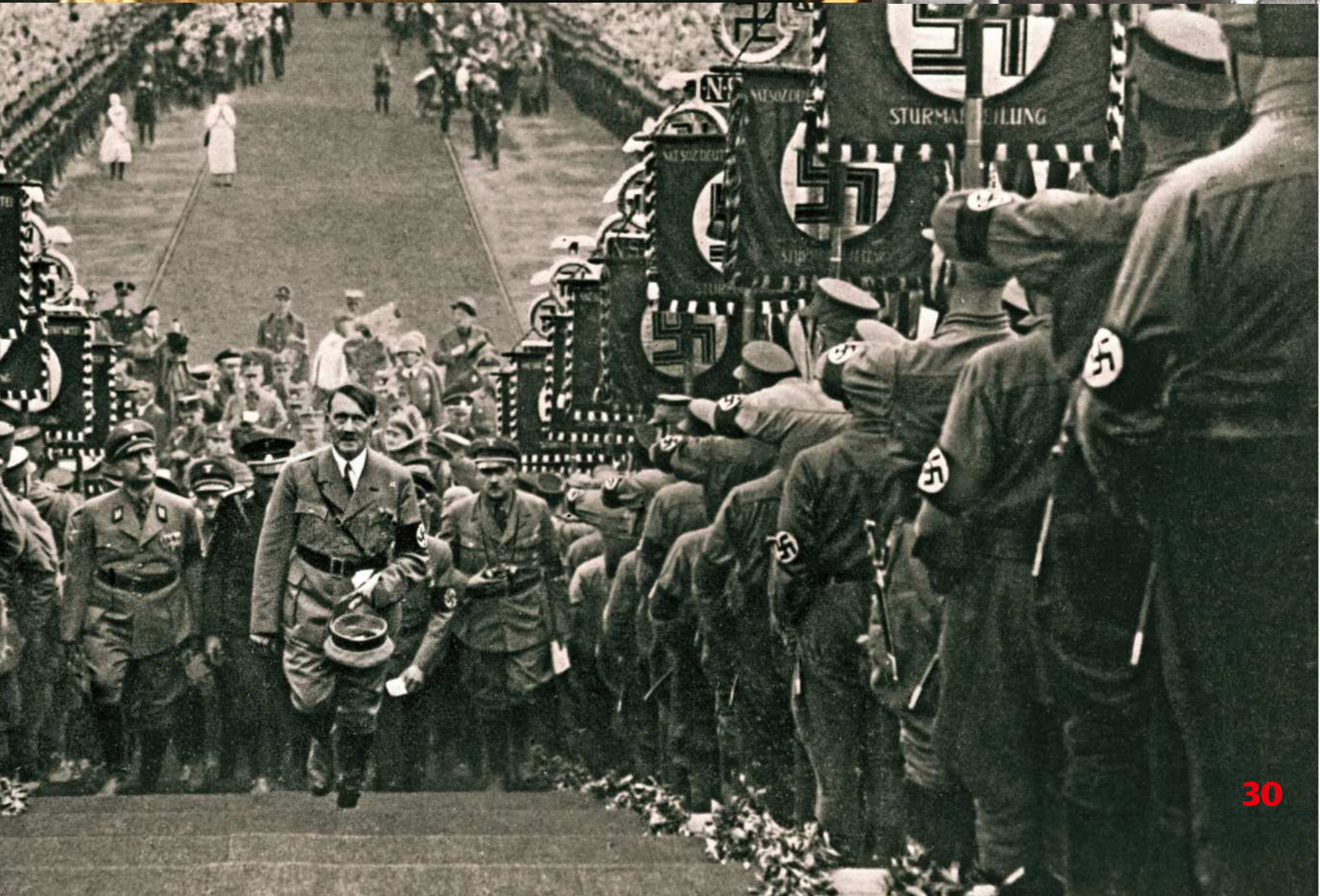

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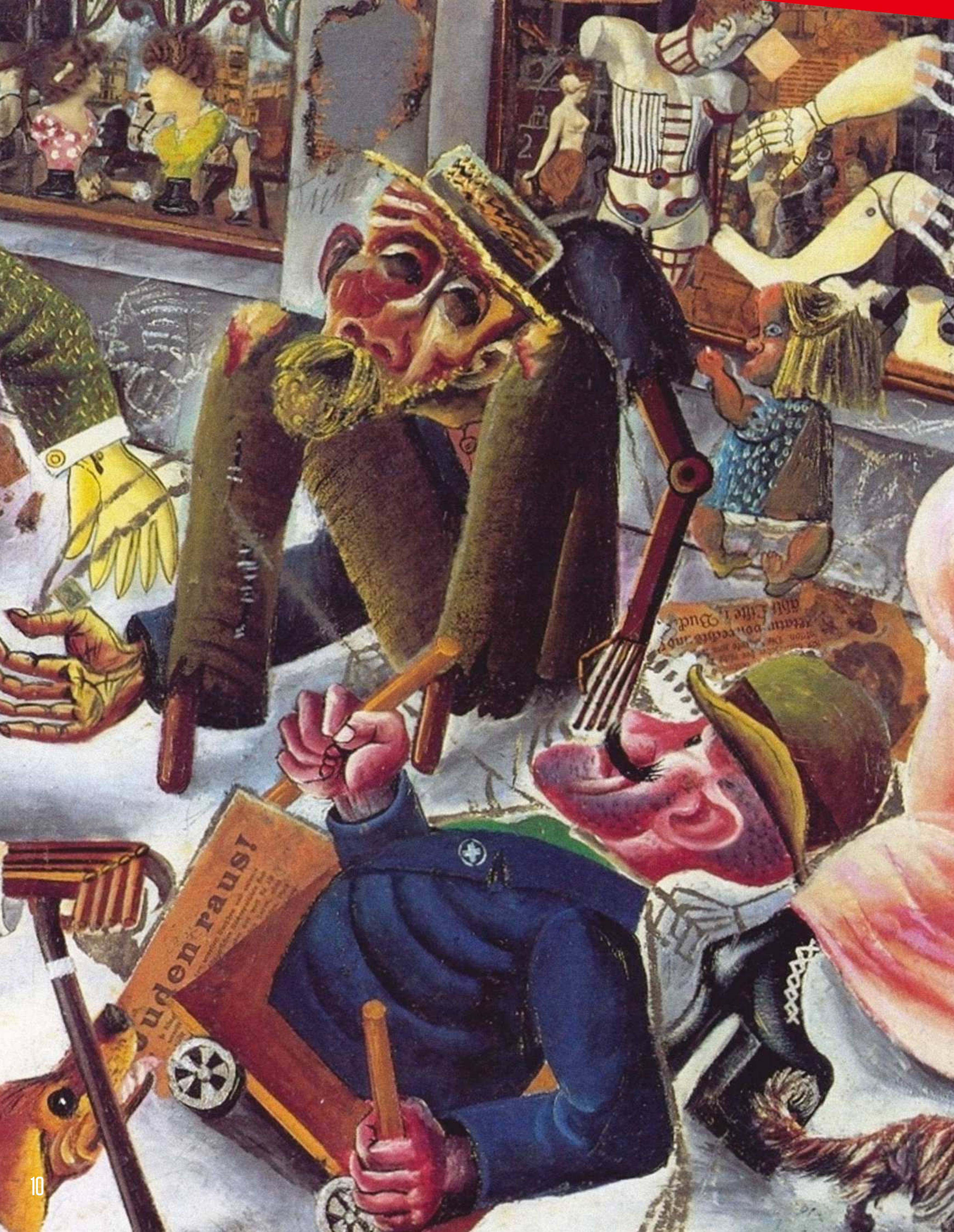

Juden raus!

# THE WILD RIDE OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

How Germany's ambitious 14-year democratic society lurched from rich cultural prosperity to disastrous economic crashes and political extremism

Inter-war Germany is remembered most as the breeding ground in which the seeds of Hitler's evil were sown. However, there is much more to this era than just a precursor to the rise of a megalomaniac. On 9 November 1918, two days before the guns finally fell silent on the Western Front, Germany's monarch Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated and fled to the Netherlands. He believed that by doing this he had, "…sacrificed myself and my throne in the belief that, by so doing, I was best serving the interests of my beloved Fatherland."

Causing a power vacuum, anarchy was unleashed onto the streets as the German Empire crumbled. The resulting German Revolution caused months of unrest, and these outbreaks of violence were an indication of just how disjointed society was and would continue to be. After the leftist defeat in the Spartacist uprising, a constitution was drawn up in January 1919 by new chancellor Friedrich Ebert and the ruling party, the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD). A new democratic system was born and it was to be known as the Weimar Republic.

However, even at the height of its golden years there was dissention running throughout Weimar society. This friction would come to a head during frequent bouts of economic mayhem during an era that was a hotbed of inflation, strained international relations, putsches and rich culture. The Weimar political experiment may have ended with Hitler's tyrannical rule, but it remains one of the most remarkable periods of 20th-century history.

# TURMOIL

## 1919-23

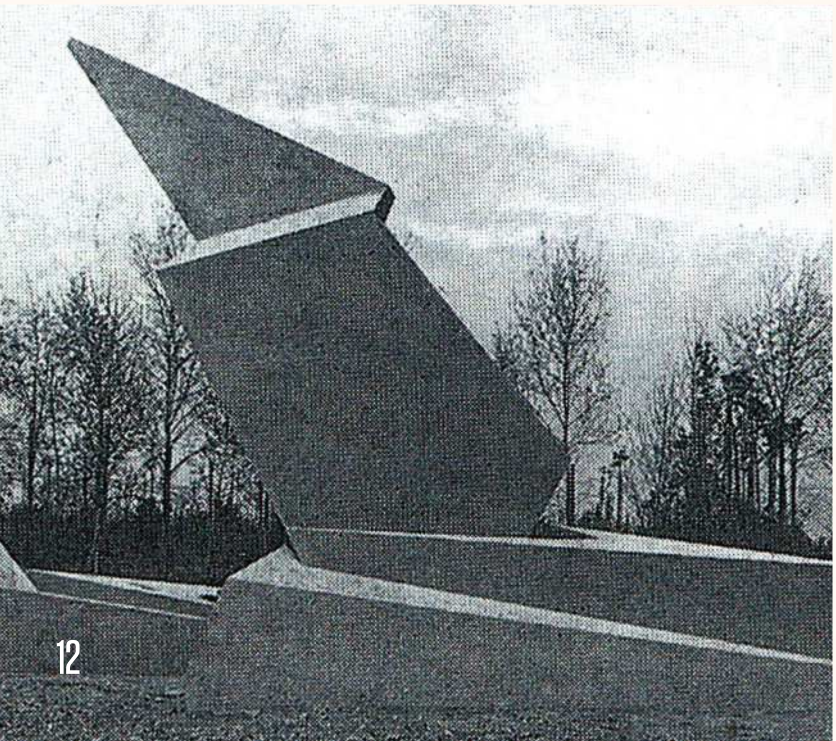
A diverse era defined by unpayable reparations, war guilt and a new-found cultural freedom

## CULTURE

**With the empire now a thing of the past, the German people seized the opportunity to embrace their freedom**

The German capital Berlin quickly established itself as one of the cultural centres of the world, a remarkable achievement considering the capitulation of the war effort only a few years previously. There were new opportunities for women across the nation, who had gained access to some modern forms of birth-control technology. New ideas in art also came to the forefront, especially at the Bauhaus, a school of design and architecture opened in the town of Weimar in 1919. However, violence continued to break out in the streets and political instability endured. This era of culture and entertainment became a way for the Weimar Germans to tolerate the troubles and helped them get through the unstable early years of the republic despite shortages of food and cash.

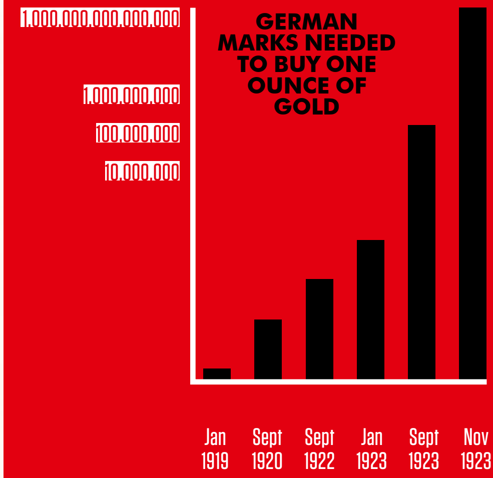
Berlin played a huge role in this new cultural expression, but it was in Munich that the roots of the most famous type of Weimar culture took hold: cabaret. Although the culture had existed in Germany since the turn of the century, it was only fully revived in the 1920s. The avant-garde role of 'Kabarett' in society only increased as the golden years of the Weimar Republic began.



## ECONOMICS

**From immense reparation payments to massive hyperinflation, German economics were stuck in the post-war doldrums**

As most of the fighting on the Western Front took place on the fields of France and Belgium, Germany benefited from a mostly unscathed Ruhr, the country's industrial heartland. This all changed, however, with the Treaty of Versailles, which crippled Germany. In 1921, the nation barely managed to pay the first of the yearly reparations of 2 billion gold marks and had to pay a large part in coal, iron and wood. By 1922, however, it was clear this was not a feasible system, and hyperinflation set in. With the Papiermark becoming more worthless by the day, people hoarded notes in wheelbarrows and rushed to spend them before prices soared again.



Hyperinflation was damaging the fledgling Weimar Republic, so in stepped Gustav Stresemann. The new chancellor, appointed in August 1923, ordered workers to return to the Ruhr and set about stabilising the country. With a new currency, the Rentenmark, and a loan from the US of $200 million under the Dawes Plan, Germany was able to get back on its feet.

# POLITICS

### With the kaiser gone, a new type of politics emerged in the young republic

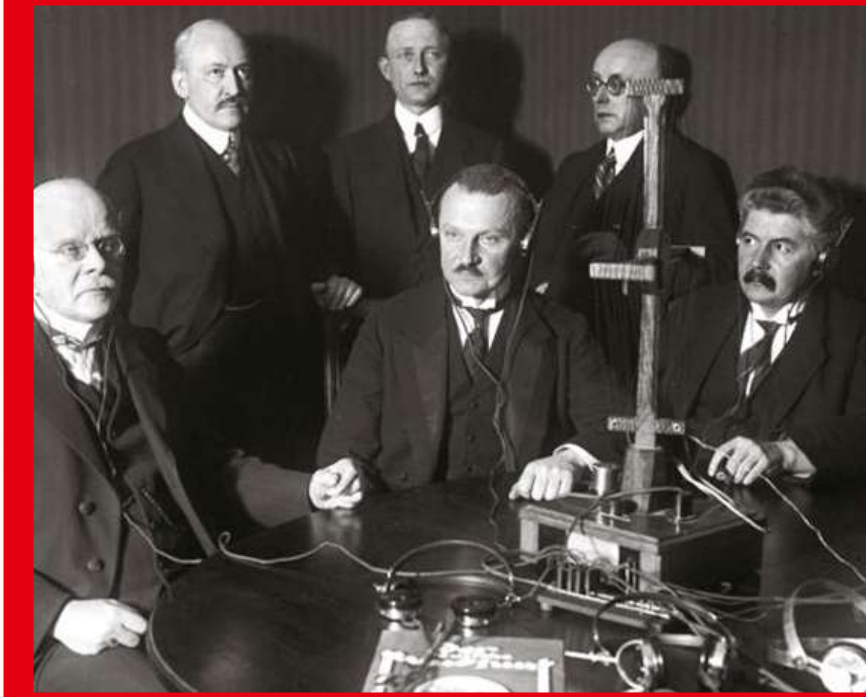
Friedrich Ebert was elected president in February 1919. Emerging from the shadow of Kaiser Wilhelm II's rule, the Weimar Republic was the phoenix rising from the flames of war. Ebert was officially handed power by Reichskanzler Prince Max von Baden and, with Germany now split into federal states called Länders, each was given control over its own affairs but ultimately answered to a centralised government housed in the Reichstag in Berlin. The Weimar Republic utilised a system of proportional representation, and all people over the age of 20 were eligible to vote. This meant a number of small parties held a stake in government affairs and no party had an overall majority. This prevented any party taking complete control.

The first major threat to Weimar Germany came in the form of the Kapp Putsch of 1920. A right-wing revolt led by civil servant and journalist Wolfgang Kapp, the attacks were directed at Ebert as the rebels believed he and the Treaty of Versailles had failed the country. The Weimar president left Berlin and fled to Dresden, where he ordered a general strike to be undertaken in the capital. This decision was a masterstroke, as it paralysed the once-threatening uprising, causing it to fizzle out after only five days. Ebert was also lucky that in 1918 he had brokered the Ebert-Groener pact with the German army, which meant there was no danger of the military overthrowing the government. The deal made him unpopular with socialists, who saw the armed forces as the enemy of the revolution, and it also ensured that the army would continue to meddle with political affairs through the years of the republic.

**FRIEDRICH EBERT**

4 February 1871 – 28 February 1925

The first president of the Weimar Republic was instrumental in bringing about the new constitution. Ebert led Germany through political turmoil but has been criticised for including the armed forces too much. His reputation eventually succumbed to the financial crisis and he died in office.



# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

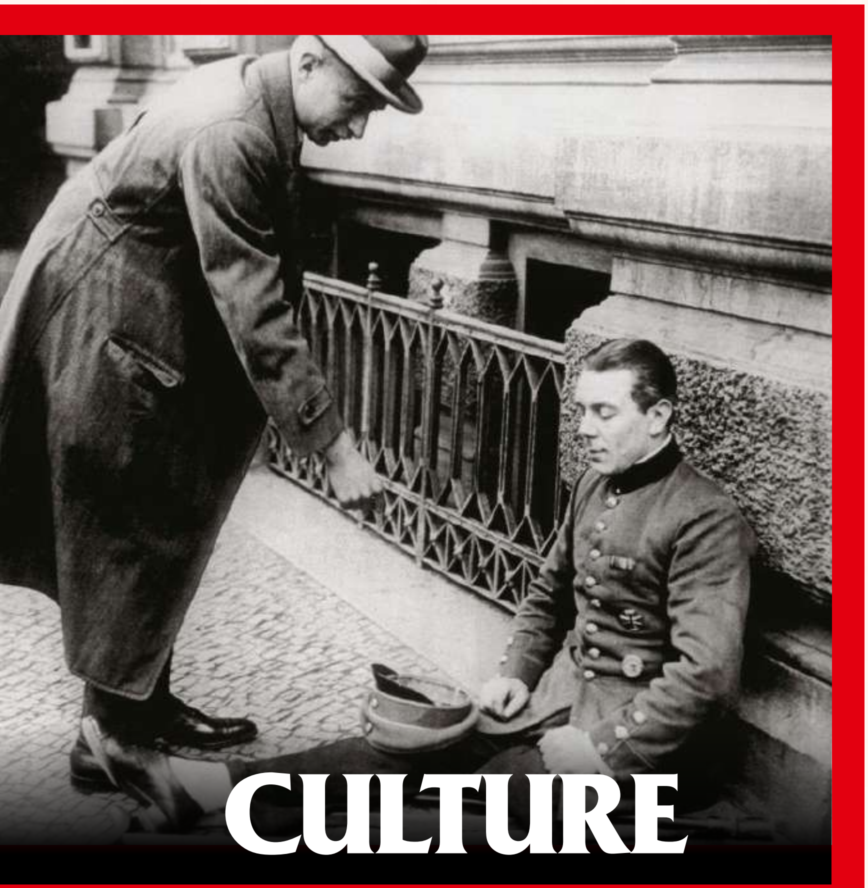
### Would the former Allied powers go easy on a defeated Germany or milk their past foe for all it was worth?

It seemed as if the entire world was on Germany's back. After the government couldn't scrape together another reparations payment, France and Belgium took it upon themselves to invade the Ruhr in 1923, the core of Germany's industrial might. Steel factories, coal mines and railroads were taken over by 60,000 aggressors, and any workers who resisted were imprisoned. The resources owed as part of the reparations would now be forcibly extracted. This broke the rules set out by the League of Nations and demonstrated the weakness of the organisation. The two-year occupation resulted in the expulsion of 150,000 Germans from the Ruhr and was a huge knock to the Weimar economy, as the government instructed the workers in the area to go on strike and then resorted to printing money to cover the costs, partly causing the hyperinflation that would soon begin to ravage the country.

The Allies were tempted to sit back and watch as the old enemy imploded on itself but eventually saw the bigger picture. Communist Russia was beginning to be seen as the biggest ideological threat to the US, Britain and France, so along with Italy and Belgium, the Dawes Committee was created to help the Weimar Republic rise again. Negotiations saw the French and Belgians soon leave the Ruhr, and Germany's national bank, the Reichsbank, was closely monitored by the group of former World War I allies. The long-term goals were still unknown, but in the short term the Weimar Republic had benefited from the generosity of its past enemies.

# GOLDEN ERA 1924-29

The brilliance of Stresemann and the lenience of the US saw the republic experience its greatest age



## CULTURE

### Bolstered by the economic upturn, filmmakers and actors oversaw the rise of cabaret and German cinema

In the golden years of the Weimar Republic, cabaret ruled the roost. New styles of music and dance were introduced under a more modern-thinking regime and Berlin, Munich and other major cities in Germany became party capitals. In Berlin's Nollendorfplatz and Wintergarten theatre in particular, restaurants and bars stayed open deep into the night among a backdrop of lewd humour and political satire. Berlin also welcomed the Bauhaus, which had been moved from Weimar and would become a major influence on the development of European art.

Cabaret may have primarily been a form of entertainment, but it also used its popularity to political effect. Serious issues were dissected with cabaret encouraging people to analyse why things were as they were and how life could be made better. The aim was to remove the nationalist rhetoric preached during the days of empire while also protecting from a Bolshevik revolution as seen in Russia. The Germans knew this prosperity was temporary but made the most of the booming culture in the golden years before depression and extremism set in.

## ECONOMICS

### A change in currency and a practical grand coalition helped Germany to establish a workable system of government

This era of prosperity was kick-started by the economic brilliance of Stresemann and the willingness of the US to come to the negotiating table. Reduced payments were in place until 1929 as inflation ceased to be a problem and the economic situation stabilised. The government strictly prevented the printing of money and restricted the amount of currency in circulation. In 1924, the Rentenmark was replaced by the Reichsmark and taxes on large companies were increased to enable the government to reinvest more wealth. This was all done under the Grand Coalition led by Stresemann and driven by the talented finance minister Hjalmar Schacht. It wasn't all plain sailing though. Unemployment was still on the rise and there was a worsening of living conditions, which meant the situation briefly became worse than pre-war levels. The most unsustainable issue of all though was the reliance on overseas loans.

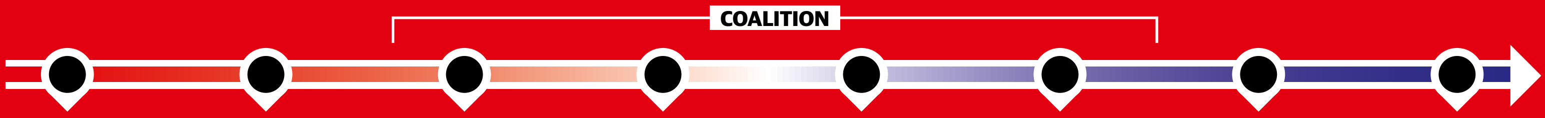
The appearance of sound economic conditions meant that during the golden years the voices of extremist parties were silenced and democracy in the Weimar Republic could finally prosper. Living conditions did suffer but society also benefited from new roads, public buildings and schools that were constructed with this newly available wealth. As the golden years went on, things changed and wages rose nationwide as industrial output doubled. Finally the Weimar Republic had reached a period of stability, but it was not to last. The American money was simply paper over the cracks and events across the Atlantic would cause more, and this time lasting, turmoil.

# POLITICS

## Dissent was kept under wraps, but extremism bubbled under the surface

The cultural boom was criticised by both the far left and far right of the political spectrum. The left saw it as an example of the wastefulness of capitalism while the right pointed to it as evidence of weak central government. All of this dissent had, for now, a minimal threat though, and with Hitler's confinement in Landsberg Prison in 1923, the biggest menace to democracy had been temporarily nullified. Perhaps most significantly, extremist parties had been officially banned, but this did not stop the likes of the KPD and NSPD building underground support bases.

The political problems within the republic arose from the fact that despite the economic recovery and cultural shift, not much was altered at the top of the pile. The series of coalitions were moderate and pro-democracy but were also minority governments and political leadership changed hands frequently. The election of war hero Paul von Hindenburg in 1925 as president was a sign of things to come. A powerful figure, he was a well-known sympathiser of right-wing politics. With the death of Stresemann in 1929, the political situation quickly became unstable once again.



### KPD

Formed out of the Spartacist Uprising, the KPD were anti-Weimar and had a particular distaste for the SPD.
**Pros:** Strong links to Moscow.
**Cons:** Not willing to work within the Weimar Republic framework.

### USPD

The Independent Socialist Party broke from the SPD in 1917 after a disagreement over Germany's continued participation in World War I.
**Pros:** Trade union support.
**Cons:** Damaging internal conflict.

### SPD

Strongly anti-communist, the SPD was a moderate socialist party and the largest in the republic.
**Pros:** Strong, deep-rooted party.
**Cons:** Proportional representation prevented them gaining a majority.

### DDP

A middle-class liberal party who faded from any sort of powerful position as the republic went on.
**Pros:** Supported League of Nations and the Weimar constitution.
**Cons:** Gained just one per cent of the vote in 1932.

### Centre Party (Z)

Also known as the Zentrum Party, it was involved in every Weimar Coalition until the coming of the NSDAP in 1933.
**Pros:** Support from all classes.
**Cons:** Tied to the rules of the Catholic Church.

### DVP

The German People's Party was a monarchist group that achieved highs of 14 per cent of the vote in 1920.
**Pros:** Gustav Stresemann was their leader.
**Cons:** The party's later devotion to far-right ideals.

### DNVP

A party that supported the old monarchy, their right-wing views meant they were the closest politically to the Nazis.
**Pros:** Strong rural and Protestant support.
**Cons:** Absorbed into the NSDAP in 1933.

### NSDAP

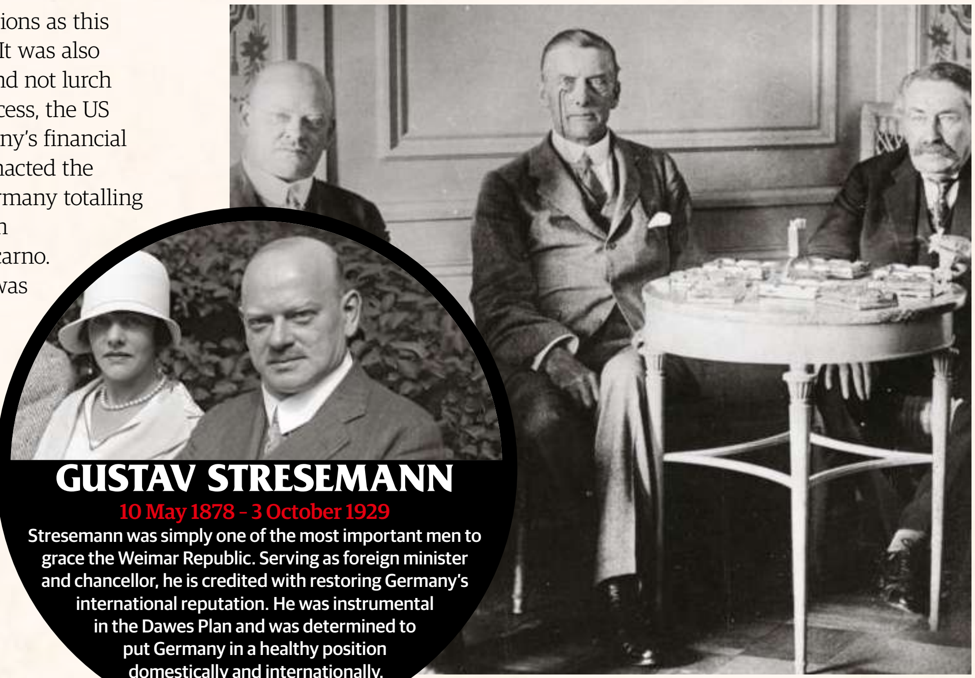
The NSDAP initially tried to overthrow the republic but changed to a legal approach after the failed Munich Putsch.
**Pros:** Apparent strong and dynamic vision for Germany.
**Cons:** Adolf Hitler's (then unknown) twisted mind.

# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## Relations with France eased as Germany became a trusted international player

The US was eager for Germany to continue paying its reparations as this helped Paris and London finance what they owed to the US. It was also hoped it would encourage Germany to embrace capitalism and not lurch towards communism. To aid the smooth running of this process, the US organised an international committee to keep tabs on Germany's financial situation. Charles Dawes was at the head of this group and enacted the Dawes Plan in April 1924, which was a loan agreement to Germany totalling 800 million Marks. This was followed by France and Belgium removing their troops from the Ruhr under the Treaty of Locarno. Two years later, Germany joined the League of Nations and was seemingly on the road to becoming a leading and respected nation on the international stage once again. By 1929, Germany's exports were 34 per cent higher than they had been in 1913 and all seemed rosy.

The Dawes Plan was a huge relief to the financially stricken Weimar state. However, it was clear the plan was far too reliant on loans, and the German people knew this, splashing the cash on cabaret shows and other cultural pursuits. Germany was now almost completely dependant on the US, so the Young Plan was formulated in 1929 to rectify this. Its system of annual payments over a 59-year period seemed sustainable, but before it was given a chance to prove itself the Wall Street Crash hit in 1929.



### GUSTAV STRESEMANN

10 May 1878 - 3 October 1929

Stresemann was simply one of the most important men to grace the Weimar Republic. Serving as foreign minister and chancellor, he is credited with restoring Germany's international reputation. He was instrumental in the Dawes Plan and was determined to put Germany in a healthy position domestically and internationally.

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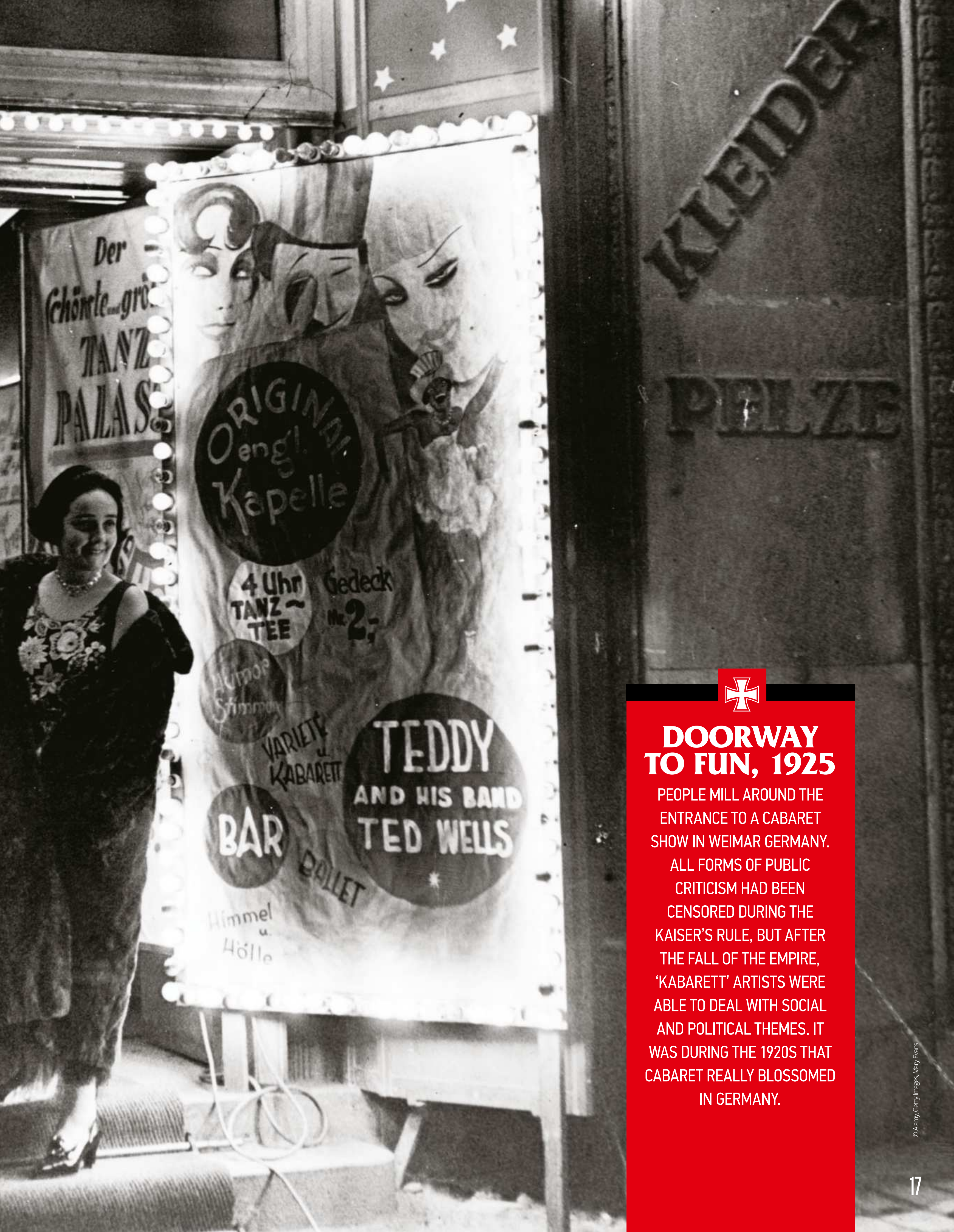
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## DOORWAY TO FUN, 1925

PEOPLE MILL AROUND THE ENTRANCE TO A CABARET SHOW IN WEIMAR GERMANY. ALL FORMS OF PUBLIC CRITICISM HAD BEEN CENSORED DURING THE KAISER'S RULE, BUT AFTER THE FALL OF THE EMPIRE, 'KABARETT' ARTISTS WERE ABLE TO DEAL WITH SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THEMES. IT WAS DURING THE 1920S THAT CABARET REALLY BLOSSOMED IN GERMANY.

© Alamy, Getty Images, Mary Evans

# WEIMAR COLLAPSE

## 1930-33

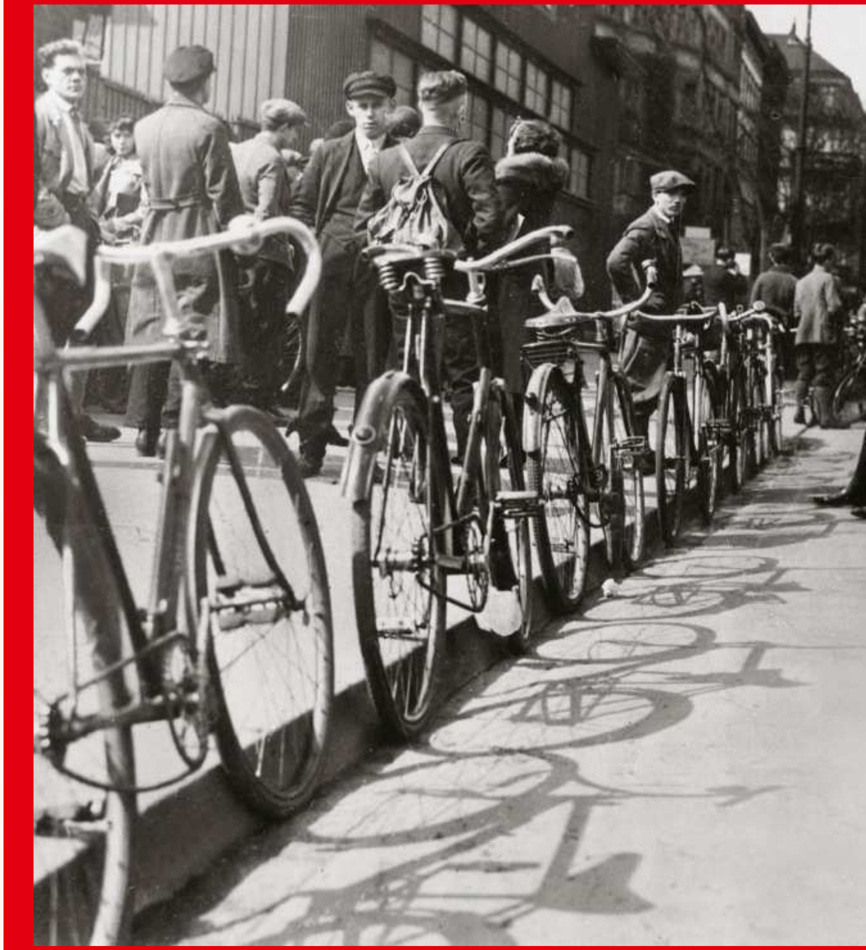
The last years of the republic saw the death of democracy and political reason

## CULTURE

**The Reichstag may have been in chaos but Weimar culture was as rich as ever**

The Weimar artistic notion of Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) continued into the 1930s. The public was still highly cynical of the effects of World War I and this was best expressed in Erich Maria Remarque's 1929 novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Kurt Tucholsky was another famous writer who authored chansons that were sung all over Germany. Influenced by these songs, playwright Bertolt Brecht used his work to help promote the ideas of a new art movement known as Dadaism and preach artistic expression against the elite.

As well as art and theatre, film was beginning to take off. Films such as *Der blaue Engel* (The Blue Angel) and *Der Kongress tanzt* (The Congress Dances) were released in the early 1930s, but their popularity suffered due to an influx of movies from Hollywood, and their creative flair was removed completely when Hitler came to power. The Nazis targeted renowned cabaret performers in their attempts to create their Volksgemeinschaft. Many were left with no option but to flee the country or accept the cultural shackles of the Third Reich. Now only cabaret that painted the Nazis in a positive light was allowed.



## ECONOMICS

**How did the Weimar Republic respond to the worst economic downturn of all time?**

The Wall Street Crash of 1929 may have occurred in downtown Manhattan but its shock waves were still felt in Berlin. The death of Gustav Stresemann that year was a further blow to the German economy, and the depression hit the country especially hard because of its reliance on American aid after the economic reparations sanctioned under Versailles. Both the Dawes and Young plans helped sustain the flagging German economy, so whatever happened to the US financially had a direct impact on the Weimar Republic. Now in a perilous situation itself, the US gave Germany a 90-day ultimatum to reinject the money into American coffers. Predictably, there was no way in which the Germans could repay this sort of capital, and other world powers were naturally experiencing financial problems of their own so were unable to bail out the Weimar Government. The US loans were removed and industrial production fell to 58 per cent of what it was in 1928.

The results were devastating. Only six years after hyperinflation, families were once again hit hard as the number of unemployed rose to 6.1 million. Chancellor Franz von Papen gave a speech on economics explaining the situation in which Germany found itself in June 1932. He condemned the high level of interest and taxation as well as the reliance on foreign debt. Although everything he said was correct, at this point talk was cheap, and it was obvious to all that the Weimar Republic was fast becoming unsustainable. Something had to give economically and, ultimately, politically.

# POLITICS

### In three years of struggle, the Reichstag bickered its way towards extremism

After the resignation of Hermann Müller in March 1930, Heinrich Brüning of the Zentrum Party was entrusted with leading Germany out of the quagmire. Brüning's tactic was to increase taxation, decrease unemployment benefits and impose high tariffs on imports. Despite his best efforts, all these measures were unsuccessful and extremist parties were now a more viable option than ever before. This was proven when 107 Nazis and 77 Communist Party members were elected to the German parliament in September 1930. The KPD, under the leadership of Ernst Thälmann, was the largest communist movement outside the USSR and was always met with apprehension by the rest of the political spectrum. Conversely, the NSDAP were now genuinely seen as a feasible party to lead the nation. Hitler's courting of wealthy industrialists seemed to pay off as media mogul Alfred Hugenberg, himself a member of the DNVP, supported the Nazis with huge donations. Hugenberg, along with other prominent industrialists, created a collaboration of right-wing nationalists called the Harzburg Front in 1931 to persuade Hindenburg to dispose of Brüning.

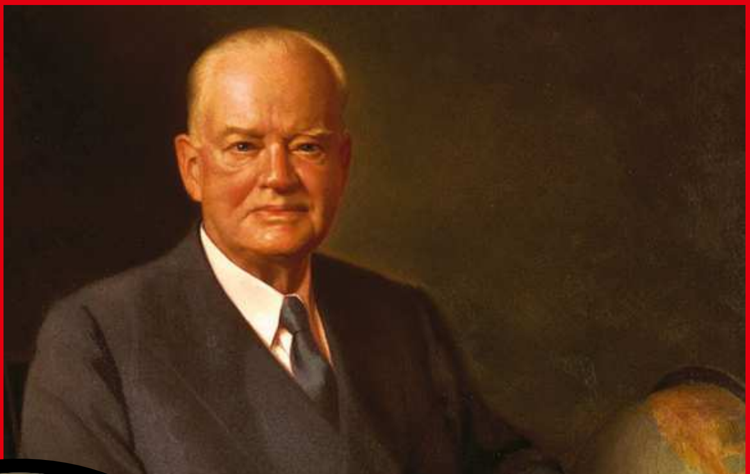
The Harzburg Front was a failure, and the relationship between Hitler and Hugenberg broke down and Hindenburg refused to budge. However, the deepening social and economic problems in the country meant the end was nigh for democracy. Brüning had lost so much ground in his own parliament that he was now reliant on emergency decrees being issued by Hindenburg. He resigned, and after two short-lived cabinets under Franz von Papen and Kurt von Schleicher, Hitler became chancellor.

# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### With the US pulling funds, the Weimar Republic was left to fend for itself

In August 1929, the *Chicago Tribune* described Germany as, "The most modern nation in Europe." However, tragedy struck with the Wall Street Crash. Having been so reliant on the US, the Weimar economy was pulled down with it. Companies went bankrupt and banks folded across Germany. The economy was simply not ready for a financial disaster of this magnitude. Industrial production fell by 40 per cent, significantly higher than the 29 per cent and 14 per cent in France and Britain respectively. As the major powers looked inwards to try to fix the economic situation, they turned a blind eye to Germany, where ideas of nationalism, fascism and other far-right politics were brewing. The collapse of German and Austrian banks sent panic through Europe. In response, country after country withdrew money from the Reichsbank and $2 billion worth of gold was lost. In 1931, US President Herbert Hoover suspended reparations in an attempt to give Germany some respite.

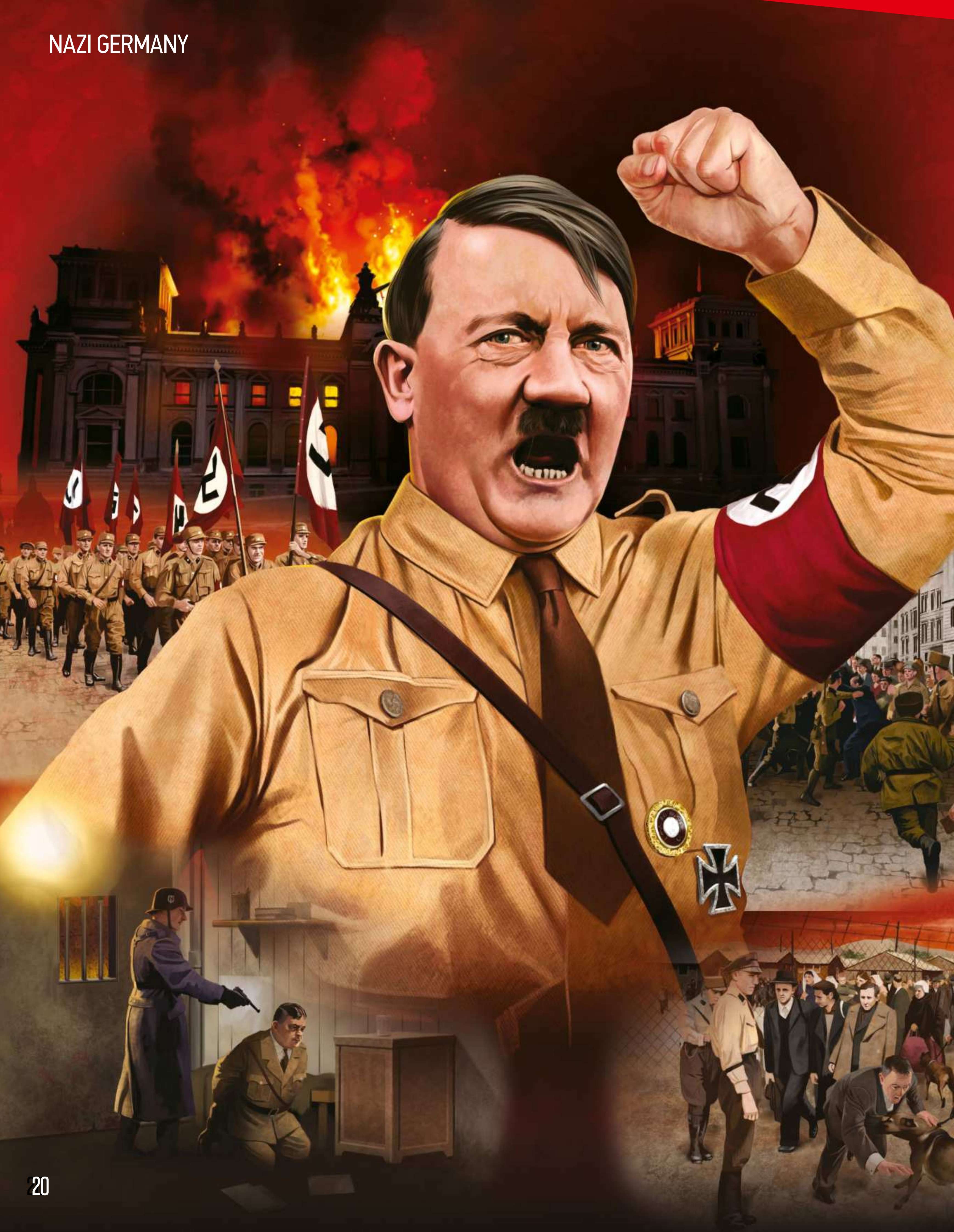
Between February and July 1932, what would be the final League of Nations disarmament conference met in Geneva with 60 nations in attendance. The request made by the League was to give up all aggression, but France and Germany could not come to an agreement over their armed forces. It was a deathblow to the association.



**PAUL VON HINDENBURG**

2 October 1847 – 2 August 1934

A famous war hero, Hindenburg avoided the majority of the blame for his country's capitulation in WWI. During the Brüning cabinet, he ensured every act passed required his signature. He reclaimed the presidency ahead of Hitler in 1932 but was easily influenced by the Nazis. In 1933, he made his gravest mistake, naming Hitler as Germany's chancellor.



# THE RISE OF EVIL: HITLER

### How the demagogue used riots, racism & repression in his quest to restore German 'greatness'

To hear Hitler tell the story in his 1924 autobiography *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), the course of his entire life - right from birth - had led to his dictatorship of Germany from 1933-45. The forces of destiny had carefully planned it all - he was a man marked by fate to lead the nation of Germany. But, in truth, history is rarely as neat as that, and Hitler's extraordinary rise to rule the totalitarian Nazi state in the 1930s and then lead the German people to war and almost total destruction is in fact far more complex.

Instead it is a story that grew from the human tragedy of World War I and the social, economic and political chaos of its aftermath, a nation drawn to extremes in its pursuit of a new beginning, and the capacity of a broken man and his circle of followers to sell a myth of national rebirth to an intelligent, cultured but equally war-scarred nation. The years from 1924, when Hitler was released from a short stint in prison, up to 1934 and the infamous bloodletting of the Night of the Long Knives mark the key period in Hitler's rise to ultimate power.

When he emerged from Landsberg Prison in the south-western Bavarian town of Landsberg am Lech on 20 December 1924, he had served only nine months of a five-year sentence for treason for his role in the Beer Hall Putsch (revolt) on 8-9 November 1923. It was an attempt by the fledgling Nazi Party (which had only formed in 1919) and a handful of fellow right-wing travellers to overthrow the hated Weimar Government.

Hitler's court trial, presided over by a pro-Nazi judge, had served only to provide him with a far-reaching public platform from which to broadcast his views, especially since the trial was being eagerly reported in the national newspapers. He not only admitted his guilt in the Putsch but in fact revelled in it. "I have resolved to be the destroyer of Marxism," he proclaimed confidently from the dock, appointing himself the 'strong man' who many on the right believed Germany needed in order to emerge from the chaos and misery of its wartime years. Post-Putsch, he no longer saw himself as the 'drummer', preparing the path for the coming leader. Instead, he was the Führer (leader) himself.

Hitler, along with Rudolf Hess (who would become Deputy Führer in 1933), passed his prison sentence quite comfortably. He was able to receive guests, and a number of his political colleagues who would later become prominent figures in the Third Reich - such as Ernst Röhm, Wilhelm Frick and Alfred Rosenberg - paid numerous visits. This allowed for a like-minded group to develop, for Hitler to continue to expound and hone his views, and for him to consolidate his role as party leader - all while behind prison walls.

On top of this, Hitler also used the time to put together his political manifesto. In fact,

Hitler sits beside his newly appointed propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, at a rally in Stuttgart, 1933

he described prison as his "university paid for by the State". The book was called *Mein Kampf* and in it he detailed a set of ideas that, at their core, changed little over the course of his life and formed the essential nucleus of National Socialist (Nazi) ideology. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler also reshaped his own history in order to reinforce the idea that destiny had called him to lead Germany.

He and many of his followers began to believe that he was on a, "…near-messianic [mission]… to become the 'Great Leader' the nation awaited, who would expunge the 'criminal betrayal of 1918', restore Germany's might and power, and create a reborn 'Germanic State of the German nation'." His autobiography saw the beginning of 'the Führer Myth' that would last for some Germans until the bitter end of Nazi rule in 1945. One sympathetic writer said in 1924, "What lies dormant in the soul of the German people has taken shape in full living features… That has appeared in Adolf Hitler: the living incarnation of the nation's yearning."

*Mein Kampf* depicted a world characterised by constant struggle. All existence could be reduced to a battle between the strong and the weak. "Those that want to live, let them fight, and those who do not want to fight in this world of eternal struggle do not deserve to live." Hitler argued for Social Darwinism, an interpretation of Darwin's theory of evolution applied to humanity and best summed up as 'survival of the fittest'.

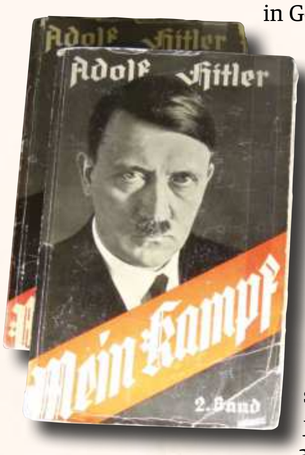
The foremost means of defining the strong and the weak was through the lens of race. As Hitler said in *Mein Kampf*, "The racial question gives the key not only to world history but to all human culture." The Aryan was the greatest expression of humanity and the German ideal was characterised as being tall, well built and healthy with blonde hair and blue eyes. The physical vitality of the Aryan was also expressed in their richly creative culture. For Hitler, Aryans were "the founders of culture". Their total opposite was the Jew. The Nazis depicted Jewry as a race, not a religion, and

one that was unhealthy physically, mentally and even spiritually.

Hitler argued that Jewry also lacked an original culture. While Aryans created culture, Jews invaded, imitated, corrupted and ultimately destroyed it. The Nazis argued this was what had recently happened in Germany. During World War I, while German men were away fighting, Jews undermined traditional German culture at home by introducing damaging modern ideas like Bolshevism and feminism. As a result, the home front collapsed and the war was lost. Here was the extreme right's infamous Dolchstosslegende, or 'stab in the back' theory.

Jews, therefore, were the enemies of Germany and had to be eliminated from society. There were varying suggestions as to how this 'elimination' should take place. So too, all German peoples throughout Europe needed to be united in a greater German state, and in order to do this more Lebensraum (living space) had to be acquired. As well as all this, the 'treachery' of the Treaty of Versailles needed to be redressed. Hitler's long-term goals were set.

There were conflicting views about *Mein Kampf* and Hitler's objectives. Economist Johannes Zahn said, "Reading *Mein Kampf* was exactly like belief in the demands of the Bible. These are demands but nobody believed they would be fulfilled one hundred per cent." Diplomat Manfred von Schröder said that, "Nobody took it really seriously." Yet Johannes Zahn argued that Jewish influence "had gone too far" in Germany and Herbert Richter, who said that *Mein Kampf* was "too crazy" to even finish reading, also felt that the German territories lost in World War I should be returned. It seemed that Hitler had tapped into a number of common beliefs in *Mein Kampf* - he had just taken them to their extremes. The book sold poorly initially, but by 1939 in Germany it was selling second only to the Bible, and by 1945, approximately 10 million copies had been purchased.



The Beer Hall Putsch and Hitler's spell in prison also taught the Nazi Party that the only route to power was through the ballot box. Armed revolution was not the answer. Instead they would beat the system from within by becoming a part of Germany's democratic system before gaining power and pulling democracy apart. As Hitler said, "If outvoting them takes longer than outshooting them, at least the results will be guaranteed by their own Constitution."

During this period, Hitler had also begun to surround himself with the men who would be crucial to the development of the Nazi movement and within the Nazi government. Joseph Goebbels, who would be devoted to Hitler right through to the apocalyptic, suicidal days inside the Führerbunker in 1945, was an intellectual radical who had a doctorate in German literature. After some initial concerns about Nazi ideology, Goebbels became a classic example of those who believed that if Hitler said it, then it must be right. Hitler, therefore, became a sort of religious figure in whom his followers had faith.

Emotional devotion was valued over rationality and reason, and this tendency characterised Hitler's entire rule. In 1927, Hitler said, "[We] put faith in the first place and not cognition. One has to believe in a cause. Only faith creates a state. What motivates people to go and do battle for religious ideas? Not cognition but blind faith."

This was certainly a characteristic seen in Goebbels, for upon reading *Mein Kampf*, he declared, "I love him… such a sparkling mind can be my leader. I bow to the greater one, the political genius… Adolf Hitler, I love you because you are great and simple at the same time. What one calls a genius."

Similar attitudes of blind devotion were expressed by Rudolf Hess, who had joined the Nazi Party in 1920 after already having spent time in Germany's right-wing movement, and Hermann Göring, the World War I flying ace who joined the Nazi Party in 1922. He later became one of the most important men in the Third Reich, initially heading the SA (Stormtroopers), then founding the Gestapo (the Nazi secret police) and heading the Luftwaffe (the German air force).

Ernst Röhm represented a different type of Nazi. Like Hess and Göring, he had been an early supporter of the movement. He joined the party in 1919 and played a key role in the Beer Hall Putsch. He held an important position as leader of the SA, but he saw the journey of the Nazi Party very much as a revolution, even beyond the Putsch, when Hitler had decided to gain power through the political mainstream. To this end, Röhm said, "… since I am an immature and wicked man, war and unrest appeal to me more than good bourgeois order. Brutality is respected, the people need wholesome fear."

While he was one of Hitler's closest friends in the early days of the Nazi movement, he did not see Hitler as a divine leader to whom he had to submit himself. He wanted to pursue his own objectives and power within the party, and it was this lack of obedience that ultimately led to his demise in 1934. Gregor Strasser, who, with his brother Otto, wanted to emphasise the Socialist

**"IT SEEMED THAT HITLER HAD TAPPED INTO A NUMBER OF COMMON BELIEFS IN MEIN KAMPF – HE HAD JUST TAKEN THEM TO THEIR EXTREMES"**

# EVOLUTION OF THE NAZI PARTY

## Nazi Party The birth of the National Socialist German Workers' Party

1918

**World War I ends**
The end of the Great War gives rise to the 'stab in the back' theory that the German army was betrayed. An ultra-right element emerges on the German political scene.

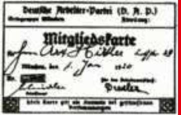
German citizens riot in the port city of Kiel

1919

**German Workers' Party forms**
Anton Drexler, along with other anti-Semitic and nationalist activists, is a prime mover in the formation of the forerunner of the Nazi Party in Munich on 5 January 1919.

1919

**Hitler joins German Workers' Party**
Ordered by the army to infiltrate the German Workers' Party, Hitler instead joins the group as its 55th member and begins his rapid rise to the leadership.


Deutsche Arbeiter-Partei (D. A. P.)

Mitgliedskarte

Adolf Hitler

1. Jan 1920

Drexler

Adolf Hitler's membership card

1920

**Becoming the Nazis**
The name of the group is formally changed to the National Socialist German Workers' Party, abbreviated as Nazis, and its first public meeting is held.

1921

**Hitler on the rise**
Using his gift for oratory, Hitler addresses a crowd of 6,000 people in Munich. Later this year he's elected chairman of the Nazi Party.

1923

**Beer Hall Putsch**
The first Nazi Party Day is held. Several Nazi cohorts are killed, and Hitler is arrested and imprisoned following the abortive Beer Hall Putsch in Munich.

1924

**A political platform**
Hitler utilises his trial for treason as a platform to denounce the current political situation in Germany. He receives a five-year sentence in Landsberg Prison.

1924

**Mein Kampf**
While in prison, Hitler receives regular visitors, enjoys remarkable freedom and dictates his manifesto, *Mein Kampf*, to his secretary, Rudolf Hess.

Hitler's book *Mein Kampf* became a best-seller in Germany

## German National People's Party The national conservative party gave Hitler a narrow voting majority

1918

**Conservative concentration**
The German National People's Party (DNVP) – a conservative organisation including several right-wing factions opposed to the Weimar Government – is formed after WWI. It becomes the largest such party in Germany prior to the expansion of the Nazis.

Emblem of the German National People's Party

1925

**Electing the old general**
The DNVP counts more than 20 per cent of German voters among its supporters and campaigns for the election of General Paul von Hindenburg as president of Germany.

Hindenburg's swearing-in ceremony, 1925

1928

**Hard right turn**
Alfred Hugenberg assumes leadership of the DNVP and turns sharply to the political right, increasing resistance to the Weimar Government. The popularity of the Nazis begins to erode the DNVP power base.

Alfred Hugenberg, leader of the DNVP

## Freikorps How these German volunteer units became embroiled in the Nazi Party

1918

**Up from defeat**
Late in the year, the first paramilitary Freikorps units organise. Composed largely of former soldiers, the right-wing Freikorps oppose the Weimar Republic and leftist groups.

1919

**Continuing unrest**
At least 65 Freikorps units are organised across Germany. They engage in street violence and the suppression of communist and left-wing uprisings, often resorting to terror and murder.

1920

**Reach for power**
The Freikorps is supposedly disbanded but continues to operate for years to come. Some Freikorps leaders participate in the failed Kapp Putsch.

Right-wing nationalist Wolfgang Kapp

## Reichswehr Hitler's relationship with Germany's military was key to the Nazis' success

1919

**Military reorganisation**
Following the defeat of Germany in World War I, the armed forces of the Weimar Republic, the Reichswehr, are created from the Provisional National Army and Navy.

Reichswehr soldiers during a training exercise

1920

**State within a state**
The leadership of the army refuses to fully support the Weimar Government, and General Hans von Seeckt, appointed chief of army command, begins to operate in a virtually autonomous manner.

General von Seeckt stands with Reichswehr officers

1920

**Clandestine rebuilding**
Although the Treaty of Versailles limits the size of the German army to 100,000, General von Seeckt conducts a clandestine campaign to build and maintain a "shadow army".

1925

**Birth of the SS**
The Schutzstaffel, or SS, is founded as a bodyguard for Hitler but evolves into a sizeable force with security, administrative and military responsibilities.

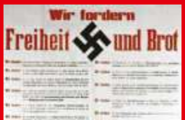
1928

**A landmark election**
During Reichstag elections, the Nazi Party receives nearly three per cent of the vote, gaining them attention from other political groups and arousing interest in the party across Germany.

Germans with campaign posters

1930

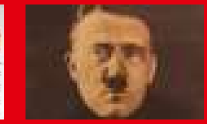
**A force in the Reichstag**
During the national election, the Nazis receive 6 million votes and increase their representation in the Reichstag from 12 seats to 107.



A Nazi Party election poster

1932

**Nazi presidential aspirations**
Paul von Hindenburg, a hero of World War I, soundly defeats Hitler in the presidential election, although the Nazi candidate receives 37 per cent of the vote.


One of Hitler's election posters

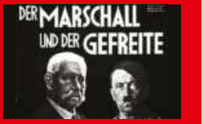
1933

**Terror on the march**
Chancellor Franz von Papen lifts the ban on the SS and paramilitary Sturmabteilung, or SA. The Nazis receive 13.7 million votes during the election, achieving a Reichstag majority with 230 seats.

Members of the SA stand to attention prior to a parade

1933

**Chancellor of Germany**
Convinced that the Nazis can be controlled if their leader is included in a coalition government, President Hindenburg appoints Hitler as the chancellor of Germany.



This propaganda poster depicts Hindenburg and Hitler as leaders of government

1934

**The Blood Purge**
To appease the army and eliminate a perceived threat to his power, Hitler purges the SA leadership and settles old scores during the Night of the Long Knives.

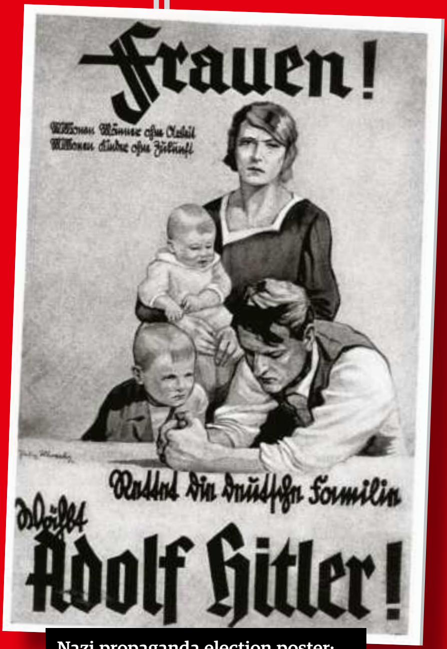
1931

**Co-operation and coalition**
The DNVP begins co-operating with the Nazis, forming coalition governments, which leads to Hugenberg's appointment as minister of economics and agriculture under Chancellor Hitler two years later.

Chancellor Hitler sits with members of the Reich cabinet

1933

**DNVP end game**
Hugenberg advocates changing the DNVP name to the German National Front (DNF) to be more representative of the country's political landscape. However, its influence wanes and many members join the Nazis.


Frauen!
Millionen Männer ohne Arbeit
Millionen Kinder ohne Zukunft
Rettet die deutsche Familie
Wählt Adolf Hitler!
Nazi propaganda election poster: "Women! Save the German Family! Vote for Adolf Hitler!" c.1930

1922

**Assassination as a political tool**
Ex-members of a Freikorps unit assassinate Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau, whom they believe is sympathetic to the political left. Rathenau is also Jewish.

Rathenau was killed by a former Freikorps unit

1933

**Allegiance to the Nazis**
During a solemn ceremony, old Freikorps flags are handed to the leaders of the SA and SS in a symbolic union with the Nazi Party.

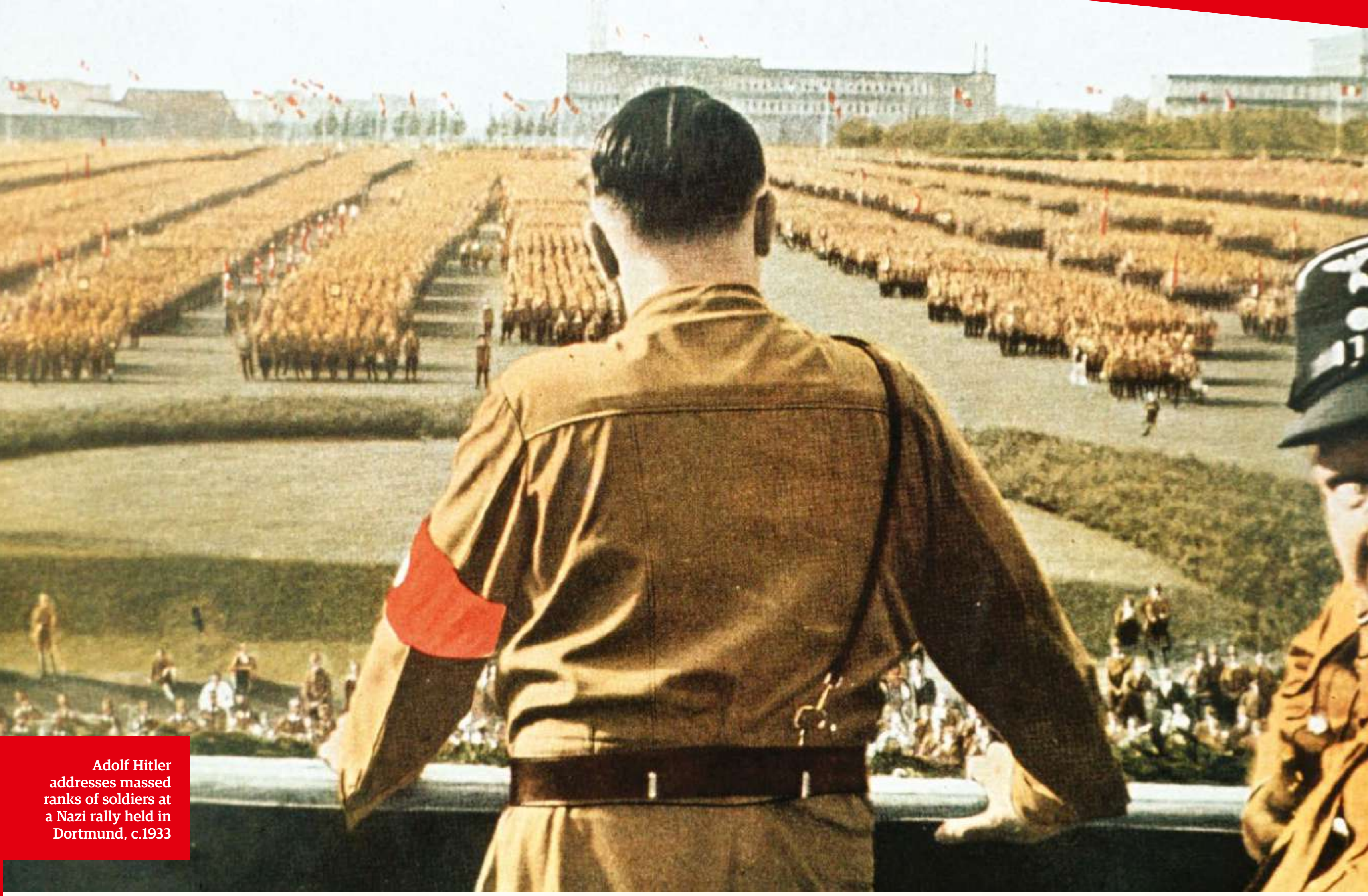
1933

**Armed rivalry**
After Hitler becomes chancellor of Germany, the Reichswehr continues its expansion. However, senior officers raise concerns about the growing power of the Sturmabteilung (SA), many times larger with approximately 3 million men.

1934

**A question of loyalty**
Gaining the co-operation of the army, Hitler purges the SA during the Night of the Long Knives. German soldiers are later required to swear an oath of loyalty to Hitler.

Hitler poses with SA troops in 1928



Adolf Hitler addresses massed ranks of soldiers at a Nazi rally held in Dortmund, c.1933

element of National Socialism above all else, similarly tried to strike out on his own path within the movement and came to regret it.

While the profound distress caused by the loss of World War I and the social and economic chaos that followed had inspired a number of Germans to at least give the Nazi Party a hearing, by the mid-1920s conditions had improved and most people had turned away from the extreme fringes of politics. By the late 1920s, however, the instability and turmoil needed by the Nazi Party to present themselves as a viable alternative government had returned.

In 1928, food prices on the world market were beginning to drop and German agricultural workers were suffering. Germany's recovery from the disastrous hyperinflation of 1923, itself brought on by Germany's attempts to pay French and British war reparations imposed by the Treaty of Versailles, had been based upon loans from the United States. As the world economy began a downturn, so Germany's already fragile economy became increasingly threatened. When the financial markets of Wall Street crashed in 1929, heralding the beginning of the Great Depression, the US called in its loans and the German economy, like so many economies around the world, went into a major downturn.

The mainstream parties in Germany seemed to offer little hope or constructive help to the general populace as major banks folded and unemployment spiralled out of control. By the end of 1929, about 1.5 million Germans were out of work. Within a year this figure had more than doubled. By early 1933, unemployment in Germany had reached a staggering 6 million. Governmental response had been to cut expenditure, wages and unemployment benefits - a disastrous move. As well as affecting the working class, the economic pain spread to the middle-class too. People looked desperately for answers, assistance and hope. The extreme parties seemed to provide answers for extreme times, and the communists and Nazis fought it out on the streets for supremacy.

Hitler was in his element. Nazi Party membership rose from 120,000 in 1929 to over 1 million by 1930. In the frequent elections brought about by ongoing instability, the Nazis rose from 2.5 per cent of the vote in 1928 to over 18 per cent in 1930. By 1932, the Nazi Party polled almost 40 per cent of the vote. Hitler's message was for unity for 'true' Germans. He called for a return to the comradeship of the war years. Jutta Rüdiger, who would later lead the League of German Girls, recalled, "I was told that this frontline soldier (Hitler) had said… the only thing that matters is comradeship, the willingness to help and stand by one another."

In 1932, Hitler challenged the ageing World War I general Paul von Hindenburg for the German presidency. In the chaos of ineffectual government, revolving-door chancellors, economic pain and social upheaval, Hitler ran two impressive presidential campaigns due in large part to the work of his propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels. Hitler became the first politician to travel widely throughout the country by aircraft. Seeming to descend from the heavens as he travelled to as many as five cities a day to speak, the 'Hitler over Germany' campaign was an enormous success.

Striking and effective election posters were put to good use. "Hitler - our last hope," read one. "Workers - the Brow, the Fist - vote for the Front Soldier Hitler!" read another, showing two burly working men gazing fiercely at the viewer. "German women, think of your children - vote Hitler," appealed another, as a fearful female figure clutched her children. One claimed, "Marxism is the guardian angel of Capitalism - vote National Socialist," with capitalism depicted as a smartly dressed, overweight Jewish man holding a bag of money. These simple posters spoke to everyone - men, women, the population at large - and they zeroed in on a common enemy: the Jew.

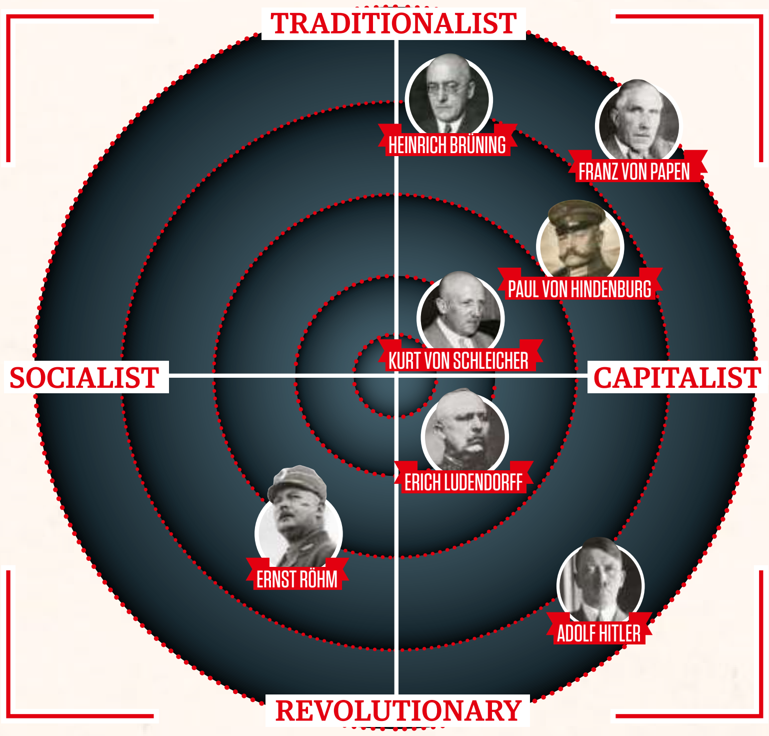
However, Germany's political elite was not convinced that the working-class corporal, as they saw him, was the man for the job. With the country's social, political and economic chaos continuing to press in, though, steps had to be taken. Believing they could control Hitler and the excesses of the Nazis if they were contained within government rather than agitating from outside, Hindenburg consented to Hitler becoming chancellor of Germany with Franz von Papen, a conservative, as vice chancellor. The error of their ways was swiftly realised.

Less than a month after Hitler's appointment as German chancellor on 30 January 1933, Berlin's Reichstag building caught fire. A Dutch communist, Marinus van der Lubbe, was blamed, but there were rumours of Nazi involvement. It was the final sign of total national emergency according to Hitler. The Enabling Act was passed on 24 March 1933. It allowed for the power to make laws without parliamentary passage through the Reichstag. Hitler proclaimed the Nazi Party was the only political party permitted in Germany. All other parties and trade unions were disbanded. Individual German states lost any autonomous powers, and Nazi officials became state governors. Jews were declared 'non-Aryans' and as such were banned from teaching, the civil service, the military and owning businesses. The first concentration camp at Dachau, near Munich, was opened on 21 March 1933. Hitler was now effectively dictator of Germany and the nation a totalitarian police state.

With his external enemies under control, Hitler turned his attention to the enemies within his own ranks. Hitler decided to act against Ernst Röhm, who had continued to agitate for a greater slice of power. He would not be subservient to the Führer and he believed the Stormtroopers should be merged with the German army and fall under his command. Himmler and Göring concocted false evidence that Röhm was planning a coup. Hindenburg demanded that Hitler react. On 30 June 1934, Röhm and the SA leadership were executed along with anyone who Hitler felt had crossed him on his rise to power; Gregor Strasser, a senior Nazi official, was included on that list. Hitler's blood-soaked Third Reich had begun.

# AXIS OF THE WEIMAR RIGHT

The German Government's key players had different approaches to healing the nation



## ADOLF HITLER

Leader of the Nazi Party since the 1920s, Hitler believed in the totalitarian state, deeming it preeminent in every way above the individual. Pragmatic in his politics, he was compelled to work together with German industrialists and financiers to consolidate power. However, he loathed capitalism and promoted the state control of economic and social institutions.

## HEINRICH BRÜNING

As chancellor of Weimar Germany from March 1930 to May 1932, Brüning's negotiations with the Nazis failed to produce a coalition government. In his memoirs he claimed to have advocated the restoration of the Hohenzollern monarchy to prevent Hitler from taking control if Hindenburg died in office.

## PAUL VON HINDENBURG

The hero of World War I, elderly Hindenburg served two terms as the president of Germany. Considered the conservative choice, Hindenburg became embroiled in the country's post-war political upheaval. In 1933, he signed the Enabling Act, vesting near-dictatorial power in Hitler and becoming complicit in the rise of the Nazi Party.

## ERNST RÖHM

A radical socialist, Röhm led the Sturmabteilung, or SA. His ruffians brawled with anti-Nazi factions in the streets. As the SA grew to outnumber the German army, Hitler perceived it as a threat. Röhm was assassinated and the SA leadership purged during the Night of the Long Knives in 1934.

## FRANZ VON PAPEN

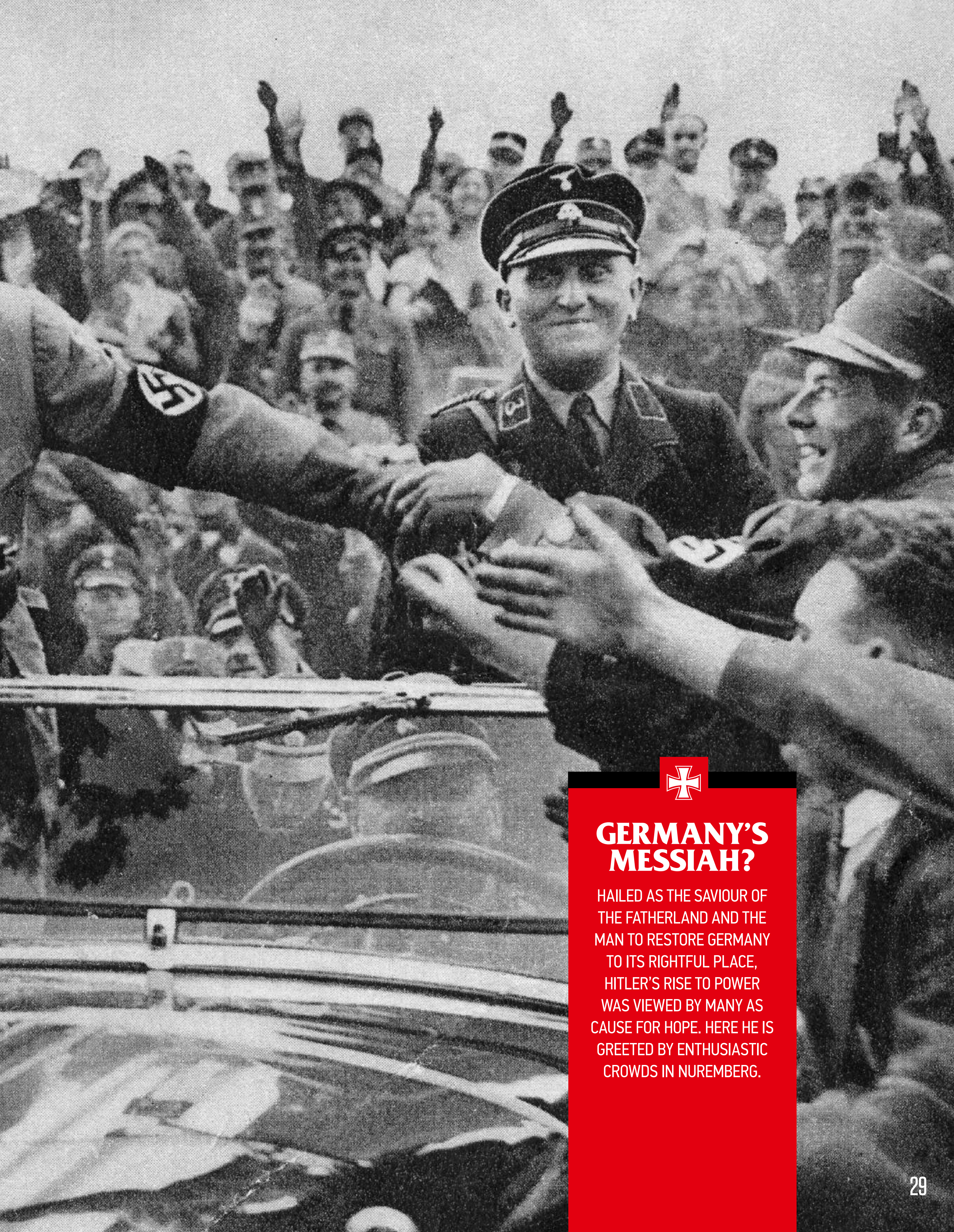
A conservative and monarchist who served as chancellor of Weimar Germany in the Weimar Republic from June to November 1932, Von Papen was largely responsible for convincing Hindenburg to appoint Hitler chancellor of Germany in 1933, believing that a post in government would keep Hitler and the Nazis under control. He was sadly mistaken.

## KURT VON SCHLEICHER

The last chancellor of Weimar Germany, Schleicher was instrumental in rebuilding the German Army in contravention of the Treaty of Versailles. Politically moderate, he attempted to form a centrist coalition government, opposing burgeoning Nazi influence. This move earned Hitler's enmity, resulting in his assassination in 1934 during the Night of the Long Knives.

## ERICH LUDENDORFF

An influential army general during World War I, a disillusioned Ludendorff became associated with right-wing political activism during the 1920s and participated in failed coup attempts in 1920 and 1923. Ludendorff served as a National Socialist member of the Reichstag but later warned of the dangers posed by a Nazi government.



## GERMANY'S MESSIAH?

HAILED AS THE SAVIOUR OF THE FATHERLAND AND THE MAN TO RESTORE GERMANY TO ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE, HITLER'S RISE TO POWER WAS VIEWED BY MANY AS CAUSE FOR HOPE. HERE HE IS GREETED BY ENTHUSIASTIC CROWDS IN NUREMBERG.

# HOW THE NAZIS SEIZED POWER

The Nazi Party's rise was not a sudden snatch of power but a slow, methodical, manipulative climb to the top

It would be easy to assume Hitler's rise to power happened like something from a fantasy story. An evil lord rises from the darkness, slaughters his opponents and enslaves a population. But the true tale of the Nazis is one of variable factors, of events where one difference could have altered everything. It is a story of a hidden threat, one that others believed they could control and didn't realise they couldn't until it was too late.

Since 1929 Germany had been suffering greatly under the grinding, relentless heel of the Great Depression. Unemployment was rife, rising from 8.5 per cent to nearly 30 per cent by 1932, and industrial production had plummeted by 42 per cent. The struggling German people were looking for radical change. The government coalition of pro-republican parties had broken, and in the elections of the 1920s the democratic parties lost their majority in the Reichstag. It was an opportunity that the NSDAP (more commonly known as the Nazi Party), and their rising star, Adolf Hitler, did not intend to let slide.

Hitler had risen quickly through the ranks in the earliest years of the party. He was an incredibly skilled speaker, and he was aware just how valuable his oratory skills were to the NSDAP. Sensing an opportunity, he gave them an ultimatum: make him leader or he'd leave the party. Realising what they could lose, party officials acquiesced. Hitler then surrounded himself with men like him, men who were willing to use violence in order to achieve their aims, and this resulted in a party that was ruthlessly driven to succeed no matter the cost.

Hitler knew that fear and uncertainty was rife within the German population and he capitalised on this. The Nazi Party unleashed an aggressive slew of propaganda to appeal to the working class. It promised that Hitler was the strong, stable leader needed to guide their country to power and prominence once again. Simply put, people wanted change and the Nazis offered it.

However, the party did not experience immediate success, with only a small gain of 12 seats in the 1928 elections. But as the country declined further into economic poverty, the party gained more support. In the 1930 election its votes increased eightfold, and in 1932 Hitler ran for president against Paul von Hindenburg. He was defeated, though not drastically, polling 30.1 per cent in the first and 36.8 per cent in the second round to Hindenburg's 49 per cent and 53 per cent.

Meanwhile, the streets of Germany became combat zones. The Nazis' paramilitary, the SA (Sturmabteilung), engaged in battles with its communist and social democrat counterparts. Although it was his party unleashing mayhem, Hitler appealed to a terrified middle class, pledging that he would restore law and order. Hatred was always bubbling away in the Nazi rhetoric, but Hitler actually sold himself on providing stability and reviving a floundering economy.

Clearly the German people believed him, because in the July 1932 election the NSDAP won 37.3 per cent of the popular vote. This meant it became the largest party in the Reichstag with 230 seats out of a

Hitler's captivating oratory performances attracted vast and devoted audiences total of 608. But it wasn't enough. Hitler didn't have a majority, and none of the other parties wished to form a coalition with him. If the other parties had been able to put their differences aside and form a coalition against Hitler it may have slowed his rise. But the communists rebuked the social democrats, splintering the opposition to the Nazis and forcing the country into another election. This time Hitler planned to win on his own terms, and he did not intend to share power.

Due to the NSDAP being the largest party, it was able to select Hermann Göring to serve as president of the Reichstag. Hitler asked to be made chancellor. However, chancellor Franz von Papen instead offered him the role of vice-chancellor. To Hitler that was a slap in the face. He didn't want to play second fiddle. He wanted to rule.

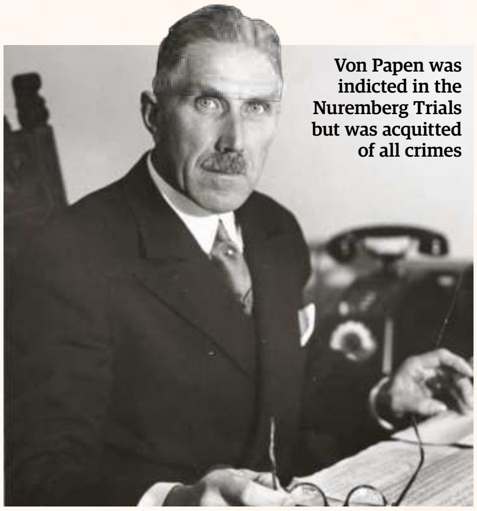
But even for Hitler things were not so simple. The resulting November 1932 election actually saw the Nazi Party lose 35 seats. Although this still meant it remained the largest party in the Reichstag, this was a massive disappointment for the Nazis. Yet again they failed to form a coalition, with none of their rivals willing to team up. This election would be the last free and fair all-German election until 1949. Hitler was getting agitated - equal, fair elections were not providing him with the results he needed quickly enough.

The government, meanwhile, was in disarray. Chancellor von Papen had been governing with no support and relying mainly on legislative decrees from Hindenburg. It was an unsustainable situation, and everyone knew it. He recognised that a vote of no confidence was coming, and he knew it would pass, so on 12 September he asked Hindenburg to dissolve parliament. With the subsequent November election providing no clear majority, things became desperate. Von Papen, knowing he still held some sway over Hindenburg, promised Hitler that he could be chancellor as long as von Papen could serve as vice-chancellor.

Hindenburg, despite the drastic political situation, was understandably wary of Hitler and didn't wish to give him any great power. But his hands were tied. The election had not provided a majority government, and he couldn't deny Hitler's rising popularity. Hindenburg received a letter from 22 esteemed representatives of industry, finance and agriculture, all imploring him to make Hitler chancellor. Hindenburg caved, agreeing to appoint Hitler to the post and forming a coalition government with the NSDAP and his own party, the DNVP - the German National People's Party.

The new cabinet was sworn in on 30 January 1933, with Hitler as chancellor, Wilhelm Frick as minister of the interior and Hermann Göring as minister without portfolio. The SA and SS poured onto the streets of Berlin in celebration, leading torchlit parades.

The other politicians were not blind. They knew that Hitler was vying for more power, and they knew the extreme right-wing leanings of his party.



Von Papen was indicted in the Nuremberg Trials but was acquitted of all crimes

## THE CHANCELLOR

### How a personal revenge quest led to Hitler being placed in the role of chancellor

Franz von Papen was a sleeping threat whose ultimate entwinement with the Nazis played a major role in their ascent to power. Previously a professional soldier, von Papen entered politics after the end of World War I, during which he was accused of sabotage and espionage. He served as deputy to the Prussian state parliament, the Landtag, as part of the ultra right wing of the Catholic Centre Party. He only became chancellor thanks to the efforts of Hindenburg's adviser Kurt von Schleicher (von Papen's best friend), much to the surprise of pretty much everyone in German political circles.

Eager to gain the support he lacked, von Papen lifted the ban on the Nazis' paramilitary and deposed the Social Democratic government of Prussia. Schleicher was understandably unhappy at this development, and he worked quickly to turn the tide against von Papen, slamming him publicly and forcing him to resign. Licking his wounds, von Papen planned his revenge against his former friend by plotting with Hitler to find a way to oust Schleicher. He managed to convince Hindenburg to appoint the Nazi leader to the position of chancellor, with von Papen serving as vice-chancellor. Von Papen foolishly thought this would give him the power to hold Hitler back, but during Hitler's purge he only narrowly escaped death.

Thanks to his reckless revenge plot, which had been fuelled by his bruised ego, von Papen had placed the most dangerous man in the world in a position of terrible power. As for his former friend-turned-rival, Schleicher would be murdered during the Night of the Long Knives in 1934.

Hitler's address to the Reichstag on 23 March 1933 comprised of false promises in order to pass the Enabling Act

Their mistake was underestimating the Nazis. The conservatives were convinced that by being in a coalition with Hitler they would be able to control him and tame the wild whims of his party. Hitler would be the popular face, but they would be the ones truly in charge in government. Hitler was a crowd favourite, but he was all talk and no action. Foreign ambassadors branded him "mediocre" and a "bad copy of Mussolini". Many demoted him publicly to merely a mascot or piece of furniture of the government. All of Hitler's extreme views and lust for power were played down. The newspapers stated that his hopes of forming a dictatorship would be impossible to fulfil because of the German nation being so proud of "the freedom of speech and thought". Even the Jewish community, which was well aware of Hitler's anti-Semitic views, was not particularly worried, believing that nobody would dare to threaten its people's constitutional rights. It simply would not happen. Not in Germany. Not in the modern world. Hitler was a wild dog, but he was on a leash.

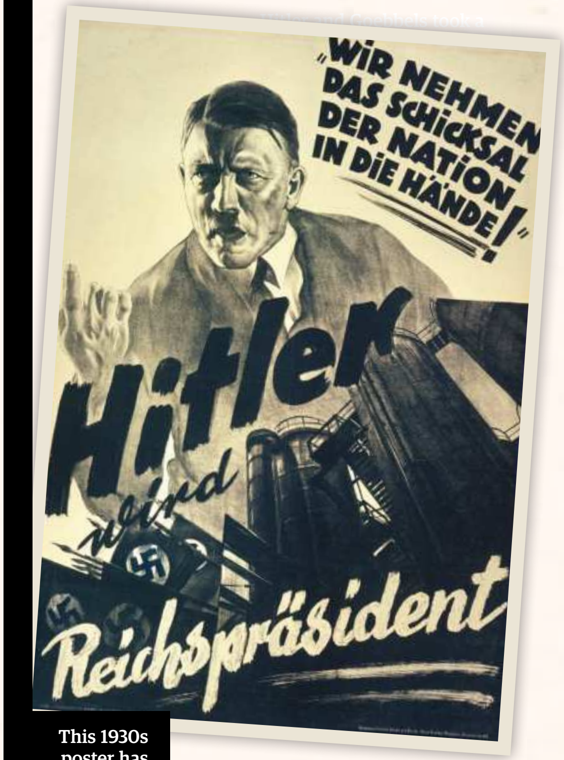
However, not everyone was easily convinced that Hitler was so simple to tame. Sir Horace Rumbold, British ambassador in Berlin, acknowledged that Hitler was hardly a statesman but he was "uncommonly clever and audacious [...] fully alive to every popular instinct". Rumbold warned the foreign office that the Nazis were "here to stay".

Another senior British diplomat, Robert Vansittart, believed that if Hitler was able to twist his circumstances and gain the upper hand, even for a second, he would exploit it and another European war would be upon them. Their quiet voices of doubt, however, were not loud enough, and it is always easier to ignore the beast than confront it.

None of the Germans who opposed Nazism acted quickly enough, and by squabbling over their own differences and divides they failed to unite against it. Underestimated and dangerously ambitious, Hitler plotted a path to absolute power under the noses of those who purported to hold him in check. He just needed a spark, a lick of flame to light the powder keg he had been building for the last 20 years. Hitler was the ultimate opportunist, and the very chance he was waiting for fell right into his lap on 27 February 1933.

Four weeks after Hitler was sworn in as chancellor, a literal fire tore through the Reichstag. The fire was first reported after 9pm, and the main chamber was already engulfed in flames by the time the authorities arrived. One man was found near the building, Marinus van der Lubbe, and he was arrested on suspicion of starting the blaze. For Hitler this was a huge moment – not because the government had been set on fire but because the alleged perpetrator was a communist.

Hitler could use this information to his advantage. He could twist it and claim that such a dangerous attack was the result of communist agitators in general. Although a German court


„WIR NEHMEN DAS SCHICKSAL DER NATION IN DIE HÄNDE!“
Hitler
wird
Reichspräsident

This 1930s poster has Hitler stating, "We take the fate of the nation in our hands"

Hindenburg was opposed to Hitler but caved in and appointed him chancellor to satisfy his demands

A huge amount of money was invested in the Nazis' 1930 campaign, with over 1 million pamphlets produced

would later decide that van der Lubbe had acted alone, the Nazis used this attack as evidence that the communists were plotting against the German government. They were the rebels, they were the agitators, they were what Germany needed to rid itself of to have any hope of stability. Hitler urged Hindenburg to pass an emergency decree suspending civil liberties and to undergo a "ruthless confrontation" of the Communist Party of Germany. Faced with a literal blaze Hindenburg could hardly disagree. The decree was passed.

This gave Hitler free reign to conduct mass arrests of communists, not excluding the delegates in parliament. For so long the Nazis had been engaged in bitter fights with the communists, their biggest rivals. Now they were gone. Their seats were empty and the Nazi Party eyed them hungrily. Another election was coming in just a few days, and this time Hitler did not intend to let a majority slip through his fingers.

Thanks to the Reichstag Fire Decree suspending most civil liberties, Germany became a nation ripe for the Nazis to exploit and twist to their will. The act suspended habeas corpus, freedom of expression, the press, the right of free association and public assembly, and even the secrecy of the postal service and telephone lines. Hitler used this to ban any publications that were not friendly to the Nazi cause and proclaimed that the only way to stop the communist plot was to vote for the Nazis during the impending election.

"AN ENABLING ACT WOULD GIVE HITLER THE POWER TO PASS LAWS"

Nazi stormtroopers unleashed a wave of violence against not only the communists but also the trade unionists, left-wingers, social democrats and the centre party. Nazi newspapers sent the population into a panic and, with thousands of communists imprisoned, their vote swelled from 33 per cent to 44. Even with Nazi organisations monitoring the vote process, this still wasn't the majority Hitler needed, but with the DNVP's eight per cent added on, Hitler's party gained a majority of 52 per cent. It hadn't been easy and it was not a runaway victory, but finally he had done it. Now Hitler's real plan for consolidating power came into effect.

Hitler knew that the president would always be the thorn in his side, for the president had the power to remove the chancellor at any point. He couldn't hope to operate freely with one man able to stop him at a moment's notice. What he needed to do was pass an enabling act. This would give him the power to pass laws by decree without them having to go through the troublesome Reichstag. This would last for four years before his new powers would be up for review, certainly enough time for Hitler to set his plans into motion. He could do a lot in four years.

An enabling act would afford Hitler the power of the president – the power to rule by decree. Such an act was almost unprecedented and passed only in situations of extreme emergency. There was one

The true blame for the Reichstag fire remains the source of much debate

© Wikipedia, Vitold Muratov

problem: Hitler needed a two-thirds majority vote to pass the act.

Hitler knew that the Social Democrats would be his biggest opposition, so he used intimidation and arrests to prevent many of them taking their seats during the vote. Hitler promised that, with his new powers, he would not threaten the Reichstag, the president, the states or the churches. He was, of course, simply doing what needed to be done to set the country back on the straight and narrow after those nasty communists messed everything up. He gave parliament a choice: "It is for you, gentlemen of the Reichstag, to decide between war and peace." Convinced by Hitler's rhetoric and likely terrified at the prospect of going against it, the remaining politicians passed the Enabling Act on 23 March 1933 without offering much in the way of opposition, essentially giving Hitler all the powers of a dictator.

All the promises Hitler made fell away almost immediately. Without any parties to oppose him, he abolished the power of the states and eliminated any non-Nazi parties. He also stripped the Reichstag of its democratic responsibilities. He allowed Hindenburg to continue ruling, and it was only until his death in August 1934 that Hitler truly consolidated all his power. However, he did not waste time, and on the very day of Hindenburg's death he commanded all soldiers to swear the Hitler Oath, a vow of unconditional obedience to their new leader.

Hitler didn't set the world ablaze on the road to securing power. Even at the height of voter intimidation and opposition arrests he failed to achieve a majority. Hitler did not convince all German people, and most actually voted for another party. But it didn't matter. He was able to seize every opportunity that fell into his lap, twisted laws and legislation and convinced his fellow politicians that he was no threat and was in fact determined to help them. Hitler deftly slipped under the radar, and by the time the mistakes were realised by those who could have stopped him it was too late. Now Germany was Hitler's to do with as he wished. The rest of Europe would soon follow.

## RUPTURING THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

### To the German people, the League was not a union but a tool of oppression

When Germany announced its withdrawal from the League of Nations in October 1933, it was the result of a storm that had been brewing for 14 years. Still licking their wounds from the Treaty of Versailles, the German people believed that the treaty had labelled them a pariah state. The treaty placed full blame on Germany for the war, while the common Germans believed their actions to be that of defence. However, the biggest humiliation to Germany by the League was the failure of other countries to disarm as they had been asked to.

Hitler leapt on this negative sentiment and held a referendum on withdrawing from the League of Nations. He intentionally timed the vote to take place close to the 15th anniversary of the Armistice of Compiègne, a bitter memory for most of Germany. Even so, such was the support for leaving that Hitler knew that he wouldn't have to use any coercion tactics to achieve his desired result. It was a landslide, with 95.1 per cent of voters marking their ballots in favour of leaving. Nine months after Hitler was appointed chancellor, Germany left the League of Nations. It marked the start of a rapid period of rearmament that eventually led to the seizure of Austria, the annexation of Bohemia and Moravia, and, fatefully for the rest of the world, an invasion of Poland in September 1939.

The League lasted 26 years, disbanding in 1946

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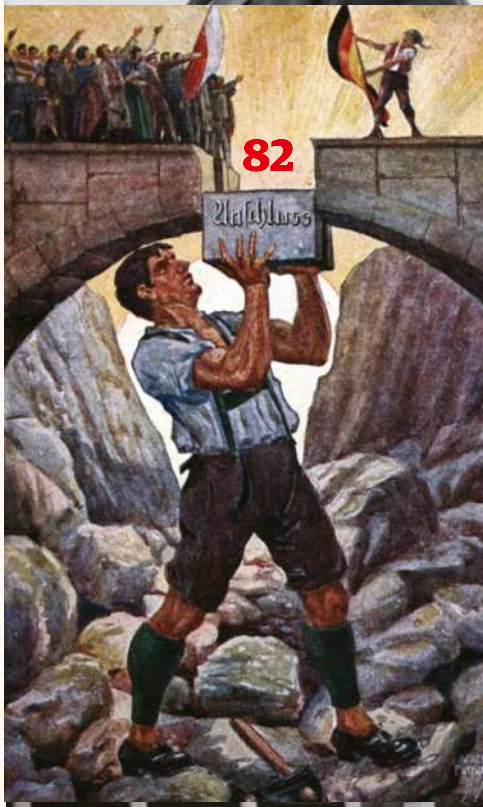

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# POLICING NAZI GERMANY

As the Nazi regime tightened its grip on the nation, threats, violence and terror were the primary weapons unleashed on the German public

The police state that emerged in Germany between the wars was not the result of a detailed and efficient master plan. It was a disorganised, often chaotic process in which rival security agencies vied for control and dominance. Although many agencies were involved, three bodies stood out in the transformation of Germany: the Gestapo, the SA and the SS.

Rivalries between the agencies were sometimes used by the Nazi hierarchy to weed out the weak or to remove those of questionable loyalty. Men considered essential to the party one year could be ruthlessly removed the next, and, in the climate of fear and suspicion, the methods employed by the security forces became steadily more severe.

The Nazis were keen to maintain a 'pseudo-legality' to their actions in the party's early years. They cultivated a climate of crisis in Germany to keep the population unsettled and therefore more likely to accept extreme measures under the pretext of restoring order. In February 1933, Hitler used a fire at the Reichstag as an excuse to introduce repressive measures, placing Germany in a state of emergency and suspending many basic democratic rights. The powers of the police were simultaneously increased to make it easier to pry into the lives of ordinary citizens. It was a turning point in the nation's history, but much of the groundwork had already been laid.

## FORMATION OF THE POLICE STATE

The Gestapo had its origins in the political police force formed in Berlin following the revolution of 1918. A distinct division, Department 1A, was given responsibility 'to observe, prevent and prosecute… all penal offences which have political

Hitler's bodyguard, with Heinrich Himmler front and centre, in 1932

Heinrich Müller (front left), in Oslo, 1941

## GESTAPO MÜLLER

### The rise and apparent fall of the head of the secret police

Heinrich Müller, whose body was never found although it is assumed he died in May 1945, commanded the Gestapo throughout World War II.

Having started his career with the Munich Political Police Department, Müller joined the SS and rose quickly through the ranks. He became a member of the Nazi Party in 1939, not out of any belief in the party's ideology but because of the enhanced career opportunities such a move would bring. His political awareness paid off, as he was appointed head of 'Amt IV', or 'Department/Office 4', of the newly formed Reich Main Security Office (an amalgamation of the Gestapo and other police divisions) in September 1939. The potentially confusing presence of another SS general with the same name was dealt with by referring to him as 'Gestapo Müller'.

In his role as a senior member of the secret police he helped to plan the Final Solution, the mass murder of the Jews of Europe. He also headed the investigation into the assassination attempt on Hitler in 1944 and was present in the Führer's bunker during the last days of the Nazi regime, but his death has never been confirmed.

character'. With around 300 field officers at the outset, Department 1A could also count on the cooperation of newly created political departments in district police forces.

Hitler saw the importance of controlling the 50,000-strong Prussian police force when he came to power in 1933. Hermann Göring was placed in command of the police and the political division (now simply known as Department 1) was separated from the rest of the force. On 26 April 1933, a 'Secret State Police Force' was authorised, with a head office in Berlin and sub-divisions throughout the country. The Geheime Staatspolizei would become known as the Gestapo.

The SA (the Sturmabteilung – literally 'storm detachment' but more commonly known as 'stormtroopers') also provided a vital service to the Nazi Party during its early years. The Nazis recognised the need for both external and internal aggression. External aggression was the responsibility of the army. Internal aggression was the job of the SA.

With many of its members having served in World War I, the SA became the muscle of the Nazi Party, willing and ever eager to take on the supporters and armed wings of rival parties, particularly the communists. Many of the veterans had been brutalised by their wartime experiences, and at least some of the savagery meted out by the SA to political rivals was motivated by a simple lust for violence. The SA was therefore always problematic. In its role as the Nazis' attack dog it had a clear and valuable function, but it proved difficult to bring to heel whenever it was let loose.

In 1932, Hitler had spoken out in support of SA members who had been convicted of murdering a communist sympathiser, and Göring had ordered the police to support the SA in their activities. In March 1933, Göring delivered a speech in which he gave tacit approval for assaults on the Jewish community, declaring that he was "unwilling to accept the notion that the police are a protection squad for Jewish shops". However, this level of support for the thuggery of the SA would not last for long, and the organisation would eventually be perceived as a threat to the regime, not least because its membership swelled to more than 4 million within a year of Hitler coming to power.

The SS (the Schutzstaffel, or 'protection squadron') started out as a small personal bodyguard for the Nazi leadership but would become the symbol of the party and the embodiment of its ideology. Expanding under the command of Heinrich Himmler, it became the party's internal police force and in its early years was especially concerned with keeping a lid on the volatile SA.

The concept of being an elite organisation took root quickly and was reinforced by strict recruitment criteria. Even having a filling could be enough to rule out a candidate. After taking a leading role in the decapitation of the SA in 1934, the SS continued to evolve and grow until it effectively became in many ways an independent army in itself.

Three men found guilty of being agents for the Gestapo in France, two of whom were sentenced to death

President of the People's Court, Roland Freisler, interrogates a witness. He was notoriously sadistic, even by the Nazis' standards

## NEW COURT SYSTEMS

Alongside the three main enforcers of security, new courts were established to strengthen the Nazis' grip on the nation. The 'Hereditary Health Courts' considered cases where sterilisation might be necessary due to hereditary diseases that could weaken the population. A million such cases were heard, many of which were brought before the court by people with no medical training. An estimated 400,000 people were sterilised.

So-called 'Special Courts' became specialists in prosecuting people for malicious gossip regarding the state of the Nazi Party itself. In 1939, the courts' role was expanded to include the crimes of listening to foreign broadcasts or helping prisoners of war or foreign workers. There were 74 Special Courts around the country, and their power increased steadily as new ordinances were implemented. Undermining the nation's will to win and being labelled a 'parasite on the body politic' were such broad offences the courts could essentially convict whomever they chose, which was mainly men between the ages of 25 and 55. An estimated 11,000 people were executed after convictions in the Special Courts.

Most notorious of all was the Volksgerichtshof – the 'People's Court'. Established in 1934, it dealt with cases of treason – both regular treason (against the external security of the state) and high treason (against the internal order of the state). Three chambers each comprised five judges, two of which were professional and three of which were lay judges appointed by the Nazi regime. With the odds thus stacked against defendants, being found innocent became a rarity, and there was no presumption of innocence in the People's Court.

## THE NAZIS IN POWER

After the Nazi Party came to power there were changes in its security structure. The SA had outlived its purpose and was soon to be sidelined, but both the Gestapo and SS would see their power enhanced. Ultimately, the SS was to become the dominant force, subsuming other police entities.

Under the direct control of Göring, the Gestapo came to rely upon a network of informers and also 'denouncers', regular members of the public who could denounce a fellow citizen for some sort of crime or undesirable behaviour. Ironically, the original intention of the forerunner of the Gestapo, Department 1, had been to act against subversion on both ends of the political spectrum, both left and right. Now it was merely an enforcement tool of the far-right Nazis and played an important role in the transformation of a democracy into a dictatorship.

A force of terror from the very beginning of the Third Reich, the Gestapo was quickly removed from state control and given sweeping powers

The SA chose their famous brown shirts simply because they were available at a discount following World War I for preventive action, including the concept of 'protective custody'. Under this provision, a person could be imprisoned or even sent to a concentration camp for an indefinite period or permanently. At the outbreak of war there were 25,000 people in camps under protective custody. Even after being released, such people would still be considered criminals by the Gestapo and were liable to be rearrested at any time.

The SS eventually won a power struggle between the two main security agencies when Himmler was appointed Reichsführer-SS and chief of the German police. SS personnel were trained to be concentration camp guards in 1934 and indoctrinated to obey all orders. The number of men in the SS had risen exponentially, from fewer than 300 in 1928 to around 209,000 by 1933. By then the organisation had been completely transformed. The SS had its own training methods and its own cadet school. It had distinctive black dress uniforms and had designed its own field-grey uniforms for active duty.

The first Waffen-SS divisions (combat units) were soon formed, including the Totenkopf ('Death's Head') Division at concentration camps such as Dachau. Waffen-SS divisions proved their worth in the war and were viewed as an elite force operating in parallel with the German army but never actually a part of it. They also quickly earned a reputation for brutality.

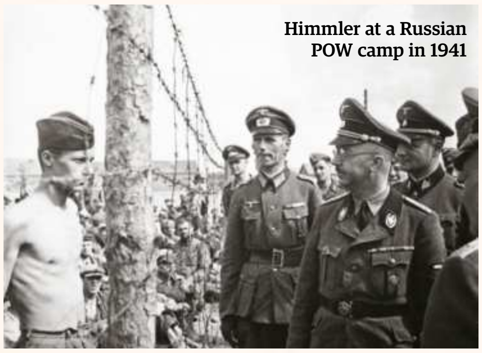
## THE GESTAPO IN ACTION

The term 'police state' only came into common usage in the 1930s, and Germany was in dubious company, being lumped in with Italy and Stalin's Soviet Union. It has generally been accepted that a police state was imposed upon the population of Germany with such speed and stealth that effective resistance was not possible. More recently, historians have considered the role played by the general public more critically, and some now claim that the people were generally aware of what was happening but were manipulated by the Nazi Party into going along with the creeping encroachments on civil liberties. Sheer terror was also a strong motivating factor for compliance. The climate of fear and uncertainty engendered by the Nazis, along with a genuine and understandable desire for law and order, allowed the Nazis to erode democratic freedoms.

The exact manner in which the security forces operated is difficult to ascertain, as most of the records of the police state were systematically destroyed as the war drew to its conclusion. Pockets of data, however, survived, including 70,000 Gestapo case files in Dusseldorf and smaller batches from other cities. Careful analysis of these files reveals how important public cooperation was for the Gestapo's operations.

Two main levels of cooperation are identifiable. One was the use of informers, who were paid in some way by the Gestapo for regular information, while the other method relied on denouncers to come forward voluntarily with information on fellow citizens, usually on a one-off basis. Estimates suggest there were at least as many informers as actual Gestapo agents, and they contributed to the terrifying reputation of the secret police, as the public came to feel they were always under surveillance.

The motives of denouncers are hard to clarify. Evidence suggests that only a quarter of all


Himmler at a Russian POW camp in 1941

## HEINRICH HIMMLER

### The dark world of the SS ruler

Heinrich Himmler was largely responsible for the growth of the SS from fewer than 300 men to the elite fighting force of Nazi Germany. His ideas on racial supremacy were curious given his own unimpressive physical qualities, but he became one of the leading figures in the Nazi Party and a key component in the development of the concentration camp system.

It was Himmler who formed the Einsatzgruppen that followed the invading armies into the Soviet Union in 1941, death squads believed to have murdered as many as 2 million people in the wake of the German advance.

Following this, Himmler rose to be chief of German police (in which capacity he presided over both the SS and the Gestapo) and minister of the interior. He was one of the major figures in the Nazi Party to be fascinated with – and even obsessed by – the occult.

Despite his fanaticism, by 1945 Himmler realised defeat was inevitable and approached the Allies in an attempt to broker a peace deal. Condemned as a traitor, he evaded arrest in Germany but was captured by the British and committed suicide in May 1945.

Men of the 3rd SS Totenkopf Division, 1941

Ernst Röhm delivers the Nazi salute at the height of his power in 1933

## ERNST RÖHM

### The charismatic leader of the Sturmabteilung destined to be killed by his master

Ernst Röhm became a member of the Nazi Party before meeting Hitler, but he was to become one of the Führer's closest allies and friends. Badly scarred during World War I, he played a leading role in the failed 'Beer Hall Putsch' of 1923 and was convicted of high treason, although he escaped punishment. Despite such impressive credentials, Hitler had doubts about his friend's plans for the paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party, and for a brief period Röhm withdrew from political life in Germany, even serving as a military advisor in Bolivia. In 1930, however, Hitler personally requested he return and take up the position of chief of staff of the SA, the Sturmabteilung. A powerful and forceful leader, his reputation was undermined by the fact that he was openly homosexual at a time when being so was illegal, but Hitler was willing to tolerate this while the SA was useful.

Following the Nazis' seizure of power the strong-arm tactics of the stormtroopers were no longer essential, and this, along with Röhm's wildly unpopular notion that the regular army should be merged into the SA, made him expendable. Falsely accused of masterminding a grab for power, he was arrested and executed on 1 July 1944 having turned down the option of committing suicide.

10 November 1938: Onlookers pass a smashed Jewish shop window in Berlin following the Kristallnacht riots

denouncements were made out of loyalty to the party, while 37 per cent were due to personal grudges and another 39 per cent had no clear motive at all. Many people felt willing to denounce a personal enemy to the Gestapo, sometimes for actual gain and sometimes merely out of spite.

Explanations for this level of cooperation with the feared Gestapo include the idea that it was the only route left open for people to change their personal circumstances. Political involvement had become meaningless in Nazi Germany, and any criticism of the regime was a criminal offence. Directly approaching the Gestapo with a problem was at least a way of effecting change, however dubious the method. Interestingly, denouncing was not considered to be shameful while being an informer most definitely was. This was perverse, because denouncing was always a matter of personal choice, whereas informers were often coerced or threatened by the Gestapo into accepting the onerous duty.

The study of Gestapo informers was enhanced in 1999 when President Bill Clinton released a huge collection of papers (known as the 'Himmler Collection') held in the National Archives in Washington, DC. The collection included details on thousands of Gestapo informers and revealed how top agents would receive training, much like spies, and might even be sent abroad to conduct missions. Jews were not customarily allowed to serve as informers, although it was permitted in Berlin, where there was a sizeable Jewish underground community. Informers might be promised immunity from arrest or even given money – as much as 500 Reichsmarks per month in some cases, but usually much less.

The steady flow of information allowed the Gestapo and SS to implement a policy of preventive security – eliminating 'criminals' before they had a chance to actually commit a criminal act. Prosecutions were common on the basis of the 'state of mind' of the defendant. The court's belief that a defendant was likely to commit a crime at some point became enough to secure a conviction.

The concept reached its ultimate level with the formation of the SS Einsatzgruppen ('Intervention Groups') for the invasion of the Soviet Union. Numbering 3,000 men in total, four such groups followed the German armies into Soviet territory with the intention of eliminating potential political opponents in captured territory. Initially satisfied with stirring up violence against Jews or communists in local populations, the groups quickly lost patience with the inefficiency of this approach and started to handle the mass executions themselves.

Heinrich Himmler (left) and Adolf Hitler inspect SS troops, circa 1938

## COLLAPSE OF THE POLICE STATE

As the war began to go badly for the Germans, the Nazis attempted to tighten their grip on the public. Trials in the People's Court had always been one-sided - defence lawyers had to apply to be admitted and such applications were often refused, leaving defendants with no effective representation. Now the courts as a whole became more draconian. There were 99 death penalties handed down in German courts in 1939. In 1943 there were 5,336. By then, the People's Court had stopped publishing its decisions, partly because they would not stand up to any sort of scrutiny, but mainly because the court was stretched to its limit handling the huge number of cases thrown its way.

In 1943, half of the people tried at the People's Court were sentenced to death, and out of 3,338 cases only 123 defendants were acquitted. At the Nuremberg Trials following the war, a judge from the Volksgerichtshof admitted that the court's primary function had been the 'suppression of opposition'.

As sinister as the Nazi police state was, its death throes were even more terrifying. As armies closed in on both sides, the police actually tried to tighten their grip on the populace. Regular bombing by Allied planes added to the public misery as the police ordered more and more round-ups of undesirables and suspects. From November 1944 the Gestapo was given permission to execute suspects on its own authority, with no referral to the courts.

Identity papers were checked with greater frequency, whether a person was travelling or simply walking down the street. The use of informers increased as the number of denouncers dropped - people were unwilling to offer information to an obviously dying regime, so incentives had to be offered to maintain the vital flow of information.

The collapse of the system came only with the fall of the Third Reich itself, but the mass destruction of documents has helped to obscure many of the activities of the Gestapo, SS and other departments, as they feared reprisals if their murderous work was fully uncovered. More than just a police state, the Nazis had built a terror state, intimidating its own populace into accepting the futility of resistance. Under the brutal control of a regime predicted to last 1,000 years, among the worst abused were the German people themselves.

DEUTSCHLAND
ERWACHE

## BEST OF ENEMIES

ERNST RÖHM, HEAD OF THE SA, WALKS ALONGSIDE HEINRICH HIMMLER (RIGHT), LEADER OF THE SS, AT A MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR AN SS COMMANDER IN BERLIN, 1934. RÖHM WOULD NOT LIVE TO SEE THE END OF THE YEAR.

# PROPAGANDA IN NAZI GERMANY

From books and newspapers to radio and cinema, discover how the Nazis attempted to control minds in the Third Reich

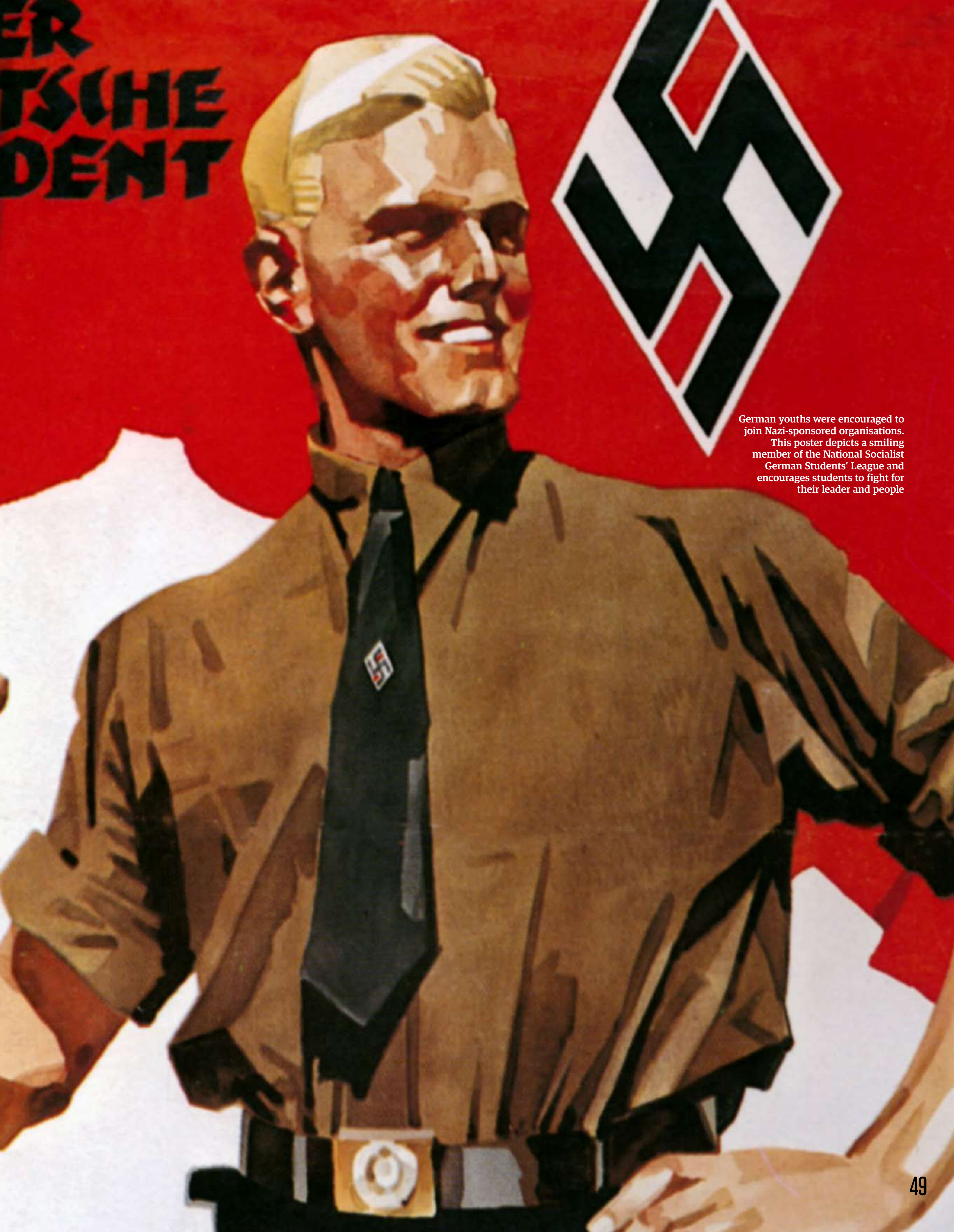
Adolf Hitler was an early exponent of fake news. Writing in *Mein Kampf* during a period of imprisonment in 1924, he explained that "Propaganda must not investigate the truth objectively... it must present only that aspect of the truth which is favourable to its own side." Hitler recognised that propaganda was a valuable tool but that it must be persistently and consistently hammered home if it is to be successful in converting people to an alternative point of view. Nine years later, when he became chancellor of Germany, Hitler stuck by the principles he had dictated from his prison cell, and propaganda became a key pillar of the Nazi regime.

At the head of the newly created Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda was Joseph Goebbels, who had taken an interest in misinformation since becoming the Nazi gauleiter (district leader) in Berlin in 1926. He used his powers to take control of the media in the Reich, censoring what could be printed and broadcast to present a state-approved vision to the people. Journalists and artists were encouraged to glorify the Nazis and the Führer and could be sacked, exiled or imprisoned if they did not. Opponents of the regime - Jews, Bolsheviks, homosexuals and, after 1939, the foreign powers with whom Germany was at war - were denigrated and made scapegoats for the Reich's problems.

The Nazi regime was responsible for horrendous crimes against humanity. Understanding how it employed propaganda helps us to understand how ordinary German people were complicit in and carried out such repulsive persecutions, wars and genocides.

## RADIO

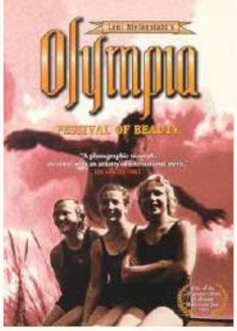
It was not without irony that Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf* that the written word was inferior to the spoken word as a persuasive medium. The future Führer spent hours practising his speeches, memorising them so he could speak without notes, building from a slow, quiet start to a lively climax of loud, repeated phrases delivered in a mesmeric voice with animated gestures.



German youths were encouraged to join Nazi-sponsored organisations. This poster depicts a smiling member of the National Socialist German Students' League and encourages students to fight for their leader and people

# FAMOUS NAZI FLICKS

**More than 1,000 films were licensed for release in the Nazi period, a handful of which were honoured by the Department of Film as being of special political value. Germans flocked to the cinema to see them, quadrupling annual ticket sales between 1933 and 1942.**



### OLYMPIA

**RELEASE DATE:** 1938
**PLOT:** Leni Riefenstahl documents the 1936 Olympics held in Berlin.

DER EWIGE JUDE
EIN DOKUMENTARFILM ÜBER DAS WELTJUDENTUM
Gestaltung: Fritz Hippler • Musik: Franz R. Friedl

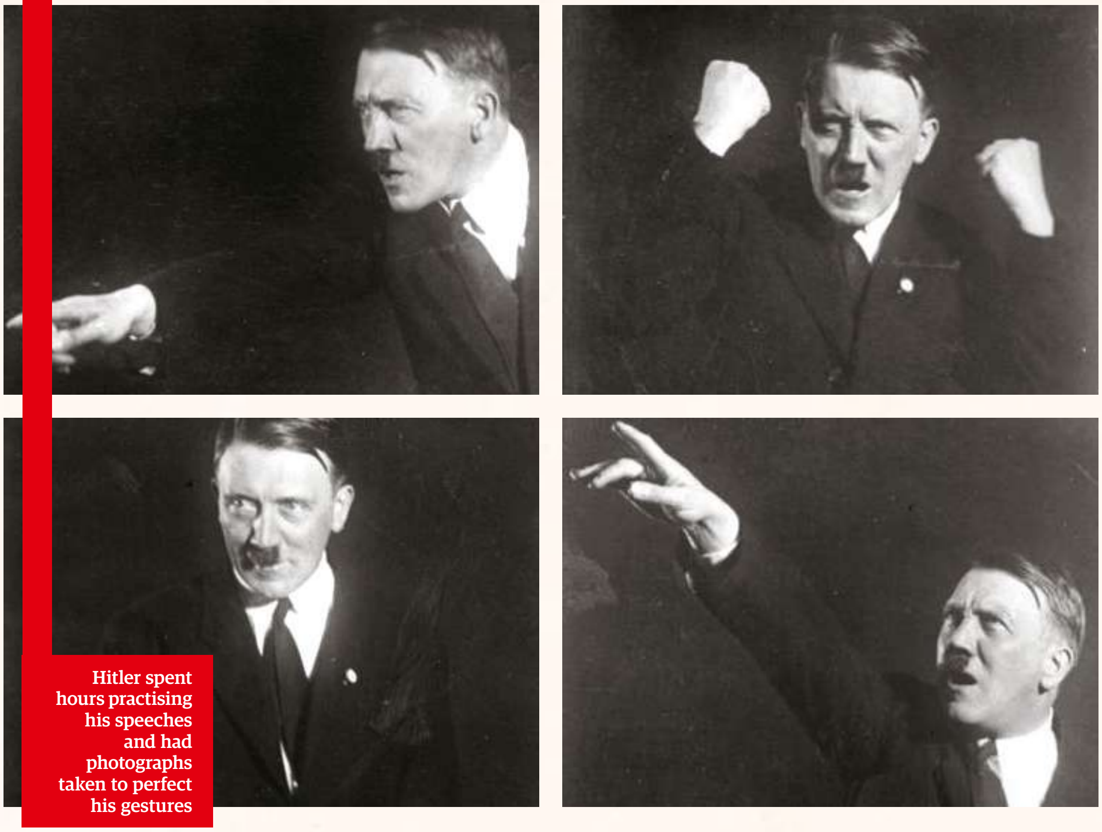
### DER EWIGE JUDE (THE ETERNAL JEW)

**RELEASE DATE:** 1940
**PLOT:** Documentary in which Polish Jews are depicted as evil and corrupt.

KINO VIDEO
Titanic
THE 1943 BANNED GERMAN EPIC

### TITANIC

**RELEASE DATE:** 1943
**PLOT:** The famous liner sinks due to the greed of her capitalist owners.



Hitler spent hours practising his speeches and had photographs taken to perfect his gestures

When the Nazis became the party of government, Hitler was quick to recognise the importance of state-sponsored radio as a medium to distribute his speeches. Under the Volksempfänger (People's Receiver) programme, subsidised wireless sets were made available in shops and, by the start of World War II, around 70 per cent of German households had one.

Deliberately limited in range to prevent curious Germans tuning into foreign broadcasts, the primary function of the Volksempfänger was to make Hitler's keynote speeches required listening. Shops and pubs were told to turn on their wireless sets when the Führer's words were broadcast; some cities even set up loudspeakers to relay them. Although the Volksempfänger initially relayed the party line only, the propaganda-heavy schedule was soon modified to include music and entertainment shows in order to keep Germans tuning in.

The Nazis also used radio waves to broadcast propaganda to occupied territory and foreign states. Foreign-born Nazis were used to front programmes in their native language; Mildred Gillars presented broadcasts to US servicemen in Europe, while William Joyce – better known as Lord Haw-Haw – was one of the voices of *Germany Calling*, which was transmitted from Hamburg to Britain and North America.

Despite their adoption of radio as a favoured propaganda outlet, the Nazi regime did not abandon the delivery of speeches in person. Hitler's harangues at the Nuremberg rallies may have been flagship orations for the whole nation to listen to, but the Nazi Party trained many other speakers to deliver small-scale lectures in schools, workplaces, local party meetings and youth groups. The Ministry of Propaganda gave ideas and suggestions as to how to approach the issues of the day and how to spin problematic subjects such as food rationing and military setbacks.

## FILMS

Adolf Hitler was a film buff. He would regularly stay up late into the night watching two or three films back to back; when watching foreign-language films (often ones banned for the rest of the population) he used plot summaries provided by his aides since he could only understand his native German. Apparently he was a fan of Mickey Mouse and Laurel and Hardy.

Both Hitler and Goebbels recognised that new cinema technology was a valuable propaganda instrument. When the Führer walked with Heinrich Himmler and SA leader Viktor Lutze through a vast crowd organised in perfectly aligned columns at the 1934 Nuremberg Rally, the scene was captured for posterity by a raised movie camera. The resulting shot, which appeared in the following year's cinema release *Triumph of the Will*, was a masterpiece of Nazi propaganda. Its director, Leni Riefenstahl, mastered aerial photography, distorted perspective and deployed moving cameras to leave the audience in no doubt that Germany was a great power once again.

In order to control what Germans saw on cinema screens, Goebbels appointed himself as the patron of German film and established a Department of Film to license the output of film companies. Some films like *Triumph of the Will* were intended to openly glorify Hitler and the Nazi regime.

Hitler and Goebbels took a keen interest in cinema as a propaganda tool

However, the majority of German films were still designed for entertainment and escapism – albeit with stringent censorship to ensure that anything that could be deemed critical of National Socialism was removed.

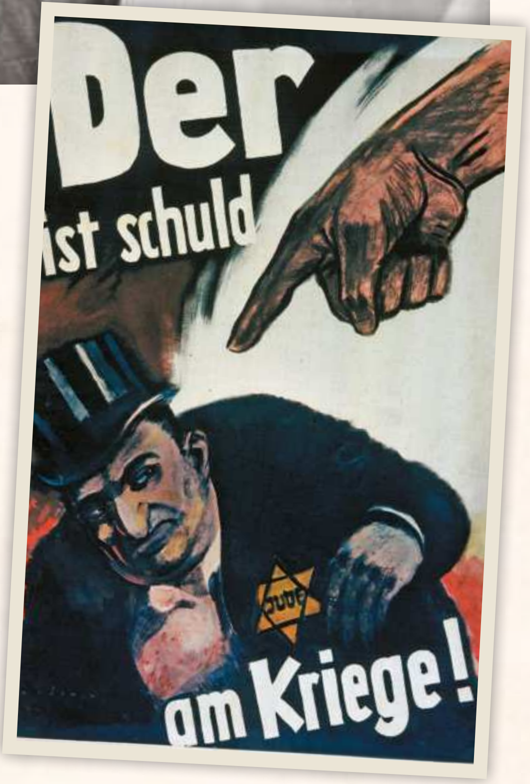
The propaganda chiefs in the department encouraged sympathetic portrayals of the regime by offering funding or tax breaks to projects they deemed suitable. Films that portrayed the Jews in a negative light were bound to be popular with the Nazi elite, as were ones that glorified Germany's armed forces. The Nazis also set up a Reich-backed film school, made it compulsory for filmmakers to join the Reichsfilmkammer (National Chamber of Film) and gradually oversaw the consolidation of more than 114 film companies into a single, effectively nationalised unit. By 1945 it is thought that around 45 million people had attended a screening put on by the Nazi Party.

## POSTERS

Buses, cafes, train carriages, station platforms, pubs – the Nazis plastered any available space with posters espousing their views. So ubiquitous was the poster campaign that the propaganda was difficult to avoid. In an era when few people owned their own car, targeting public transport with placards was a particularly successful way of capturing the gaze of countless passers-by. The effect was to gradually wear down and convert opponents through regular and unavoidable exposure to the party line.

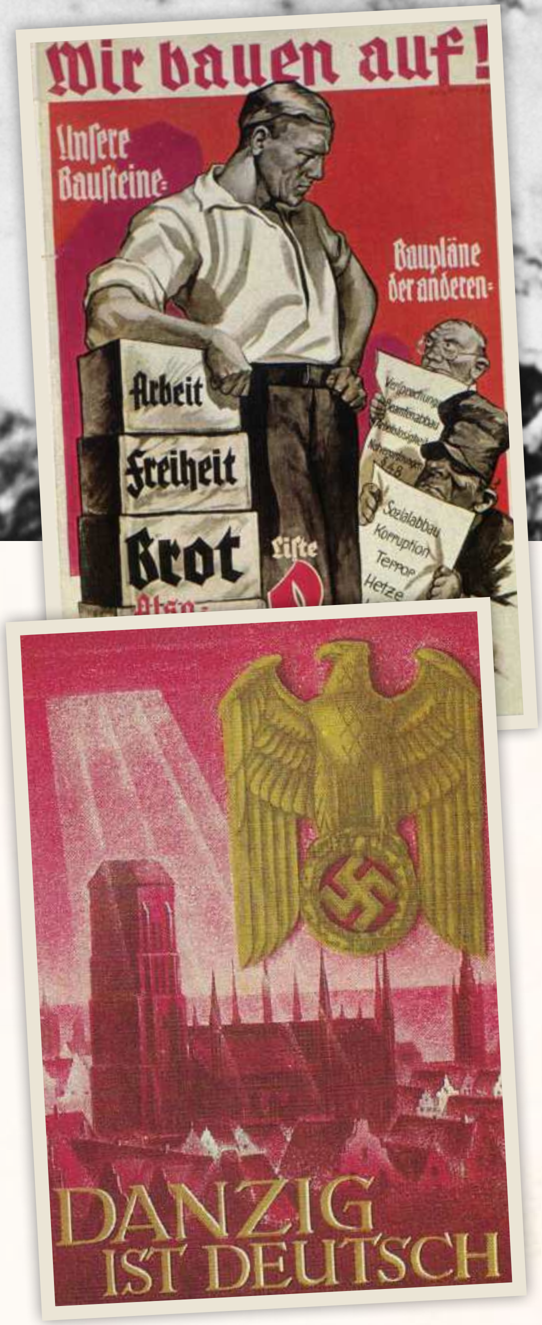
The most effective posters combined a simple message or call to action with a striking image and slogan. The Nazis used posters to promote their far-right ideology (particularly prior to 1933, when the party still competed in elections) and to promote a glowing and positive Nazi vision of the future. Posters also encouraged people to join Nazi organisations like the League of German Maidens and Hitler Youth and focused hatred on opponents – particularly the Jews – depicting them as outsiders and enemies of the Reich.

Between 1936 and 1943, the Ministry of Propaganda printed and distributed 125,000 posters every week. Among them were the poster-newspaper *Parole der Woche* (Slogan of the Week), which was one metre high and two metres wide and featured catchy text written large enough that it could be easily read from a distance. Often coloured in bold red and black to capture attention,



Propaganda posters blamed Jews for the Reich's woes – in this case, for leading Germany into war

The Nazis attempted to control the information available to the German people by burning books



sometimes with images drawn by artist Hans Schweitzer, the *Parole der Woche* repeated familiar themes: criticising foreign powers who threatened Germany, railing against the Jews and lionising German military successes.

## BOOKS

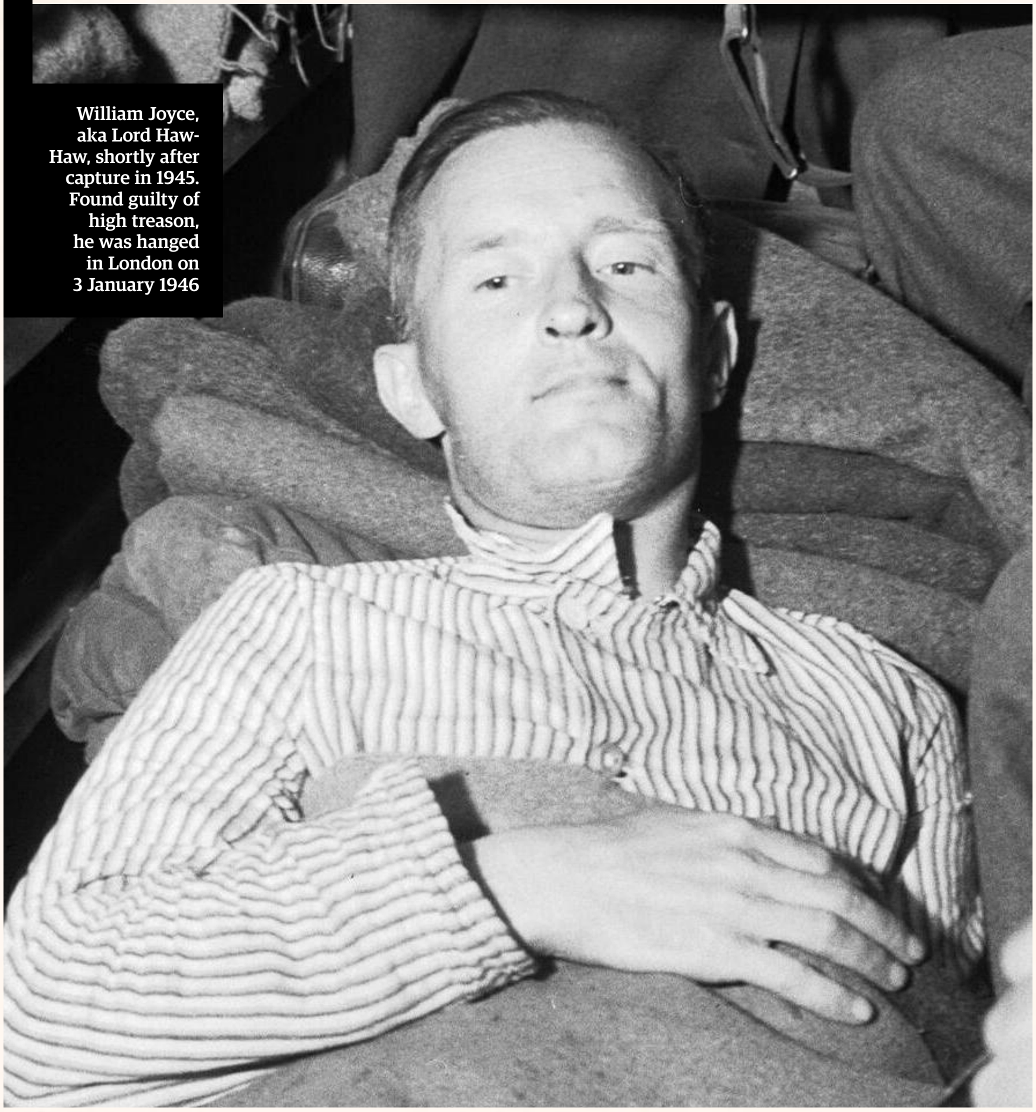
There are few more striking examples of Nazi propaganda in action than the sight of members of the SA and German Student Union throwing books onto public bonfires in the summer of 1933. By suppressing any books viewed as subversive or opposed to National Socialism, the Nazis were actively seeking to control the information, facts and opinion available to its people.

Among the works banned by the Nazis were any books supporting ideologies that clashed with Nazism, including communism, democracy and pacifism. Jewish authors were outlawed, as were foreign authors, who were seen as denigrating Germany, the most notable of whom was H G Wells. Books that promoted National Socialism or ideals associated with the Nazis were encouraged, none more so than the Führer's own *Mein Kampf.* More than 10 million copies were in circulation by 1945: the result of phenomenal bookshop sales and a copy being given free to each newly married couple and soldier at the front.

In schools, Nazi material was often crowbarred into textbooks. Geography lessons stated how overcrowded Germany was and the need for Lebensraum (more living space). Biology textbooks covered racial theory and eugenics. History focused on Germanic heroes like Frederick the Great and Otto von Bismarck. Titles chosen for literature study were carefully monitored, and the Nazis were not above rewriting popular classics to suit their needs. *Heidi* was stripped of its Christian themes, while *Robinson Crusoe* was rewritten so the friendship between Crusoe and Friday became a master-slave relationship.

## NEWSPAPERS

The Nazi Party was quick to recognise that control of the news media meant control of people's opinions. The party established its first newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter* (People's Observer), in Munich in 1920, while Joseph Goebbels first dipped his toe into newsprint with *Der Angriff* (The Attack), which was printed in Berlin from 1927.



William Joyce, aka Lord Haw-Haw, shortly after capture in 1945. Found guilty of high treason, he was hanged in London on 3 January 1946

Ludwig Dettmann was among the Nazi-approved painters on a list of important artists

Once they surged into power, the Nazis took a rough hold of the rest of the print media. The 1933 Reich Press Law banned Jewish editors and journalists; those who remained had to take a Nazi citizenship test and prove that they were not married to a Jew. Most non-Nazi newspapers were forced out of business. Only the respected *Frankfurter Zeitung* avoided editorial interference, but even then only on the understanding that its Jewish contributors stood down. Faced with declining sales, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* eventually printed its last issue in 1943.

However, Nazi-sponsored newspapers flourished. *Das Reich* contained editorials written by Goebbels, while *Das Schwarze Korps* was distributed free to SS members. *Der Stürmer* was the most virulently anti-Semitic newspaper of all, and even Goebbels and Hermann Goering thought it did more harm than good to the Nazi cause, although Hitler supposedly read every issue from cover to cover. Hard-line editor Julius Streicher used the pages of *Der Stürmer* to call for the annihilation of the Jewish race as early as 1933, but Goebbels succeeded in temporarily banning the tabloid during the 1936 Olympics in Berlin and later permanently closing it due to a paper shortage in February 1945.

## ART

When young Hitler was a budding artist in the years preceding World War I, his paintings indicated an interest in historical styles, with hints of Greco-Roman classicism and the Italian Renaissance. Fast-forward a couple of decades and the Führer's tastes had changed little, but his preferences were now pervaded with anti-Semitism. In Hitler's opinion, classical artists were pure and Aryan, while modern art was indecipherable and distorted as a result of Jewish influences.

To demonstrate this to the German people, two art exhibitions opened in Munich in July 1937. The Great German Art Exhibition at the purpose-built House of German Art displayed the work of artists who were endorsed by Hitler and the Reichskulturkammer (National Chamber of Culture). The nearby Degenerate Art Exhibition, in contrast, contained modern art that had been confiscated from German museums and galleries. Its 650 pieces were deliberately crammed into a smaller space and accompanied by derogatory slogans, but - somewhat embarrassingly - the four-month run attracted more than three times the number of visitors of its Nazi-endorsed alternative.

The Nazis also sought to cash in on 'degenerate' art by selling unwanted pieces abroad. Those that remained were often disposed of in a callous manner. The Berlin Fire Brigade was tasked with burning around 5,000 paintings on 20 March 1939, while works by Picasso and Dalí were burned in occupied Paris on 27 July 1942.

In contrast, works by artists deemed acceptable by the state were encouraged, although explicitly political messages were rare in art. In September 1944, Goebbels created a 36-page booklet listing more than 1,000 artists who were considered to be crucial to Nazi culture; 24 were named as especially indispensable "national treasures". Hitler planned to open an art museum near his birthplace to display a selection of Nazi-endorsed art, but it never got beyond the planning stage. As the Third Reich collapsed, Hitler retreated to his Berlin bunker and spent hours staring at a model of the proposed Führermuseum. Even at the moment of capitulation, he still dreamed about the effect that art and propaganda might have on his defeated Reich.

# WOMEN OF THE REICH

## From work to hairstyles, almost every aspect of a German woman's life changed when the Nazis took over

During the brief reign of the Weimar Republic, women in Germany were granted Gleichberechtigung, or 'equal rights', and enjoyed relatively high levels of freedom for the time. World War I had made it necessary for some women to work, and they had proved themselves far more capable than many had previously believed. 35 women held positions in the Reichstag in 1933, and women earned as much as their male counterparts in professions such as medicine and law. When the Nazi Party assumed power, however, Gleichberechtigung was replaced with Gleichstellung - 'equivalence'. A seemingly minor difference on the surface, this new term demonstrated Hitler's belief that it was natural for men and women to fill different roles in society rather than work side by side.

Through his speeches and propaganda, Hitler assured women that they were highly valued in the Third Reich but that their role was different to that of men. They shouldn't try to match men in the workplace; instead they should aim to excel in the home, the woman's natural environment. In one speech Hitler said to the crowd, "If the man's world is said to be the state, his struggle, his readiness to devote his powers to the service of the community, then it may perhaps be said that the woman's is a smaller world. For her world is her husband, her family, her children and her home. But what would become of the greater world if there were no one to tend and care for the smaller one? [...] We do not consider it correct for the woman to interfere in the world of the man, in his main sphere. We consider it natural if these two worlds remain distinct."

As the Nazis set about restructuring the country, women were encouraged to give up their jobs and focus all of their attention on the 'Three Ks' - Kinder, Küche and Kirche, or children, kitchen and church - while the men did everything else. As loyal Christians, they were expected to conduct themselves with modesty at all times, and as loyal wives they were to obey and serve their husbands.

Preparation for a life of obedient domesticity began early. Girls were taught the skills they'd need as wives at school and in their compulsory time in the Nazi League of German Girls, and they were strongly discouraged from pursuing any form of higher education - a cap was even placed on university places, allowing women to make up just ten per cent of admissions. Although the strict enforcement of gender roles seems oppressive today, many women actually welcomed the return to traditional values.

Goebbels said, "The mission of women is to be beautiful and to bring children into the world." The Nazi idea of beauty placed emphasis on modesty, femininity and fertility. German women were encouraged to wear traditional dress and wear their hair in a braid or a bun. Makeup, perms and immodest clothes were frowned upon, as were 'masculine' and unhealthy habits like drinking and smoking. Women took part in light exercise to maintain their figures and their health, but losing weight was not among their aspirations - it was thought that thin women struggled to give birth. As a reward for staying home to take care of themselves and their families, women were offered evening classes, group activities and discounts on tickets to sporting events and the theatre.

For single women reluctant to give up their work, resistance became increasingly difficult. The Law for the Reduction of Unemployment was passed in June 1933, providing financial incentives for women to stay at home so that unemployed men could fill their jobs. Ultimately, women were forced out of jobs in the civil service and the professions - 15 per cent of female teachers lost their jobs in 1933, and in the same year almost 20,000 female civil

According to Hitler, the primary role of a woman was to produce loyal Aryan children

## THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST WOMEN'S LEAGUE

**Many women were fierce supporters of the Nazi Party, despite restrictions against them**

As Hitler believed men and women should remain in their own spheres, women had their own wing of the Nazi Party: the Nationalist Socialist Women's League (Nationalsozialistische Frauenschaft in German, abbreviated as NS-Frauenschaft). The League was founded in 1931, the amalgamation of multiple national socialist and nationalist women's groups. From 1933 to the end of World War II it operated under the leadership of Reich Women's Leader Gertrud Scholtz-Klink.

Women in the League took part in activities like providing refreshments at train stations, collecting scrap metal and distributing Nazi propaganda. Activities for members also included classes in sanitation, the use of German-manufactured products, childcare and cookery. Scholtz-Klink told the women, "Our weapon is the soup ladle, but let no one underrate its efficacy."

By 1938 the League had reached a membership of 2 million, meaning that women made up 40 per cent of the Nazi Party. The League's biweekly magazine, the *NS-Frauen-Warte*, achieved a peak circulation of 1.9 million, helping to reinforce strict gender roles and drum up support for the Third Reich. Despite this, the NSWL was still seen as subordinated to the male wing.

servants were fired. In 1936 they were banned from becoming judges, and they were even excluded from jury service because it was believed they were unable to 'reason objectively'. Any women protesting the job losses risked being sent to a concentration camp as political prisoners.

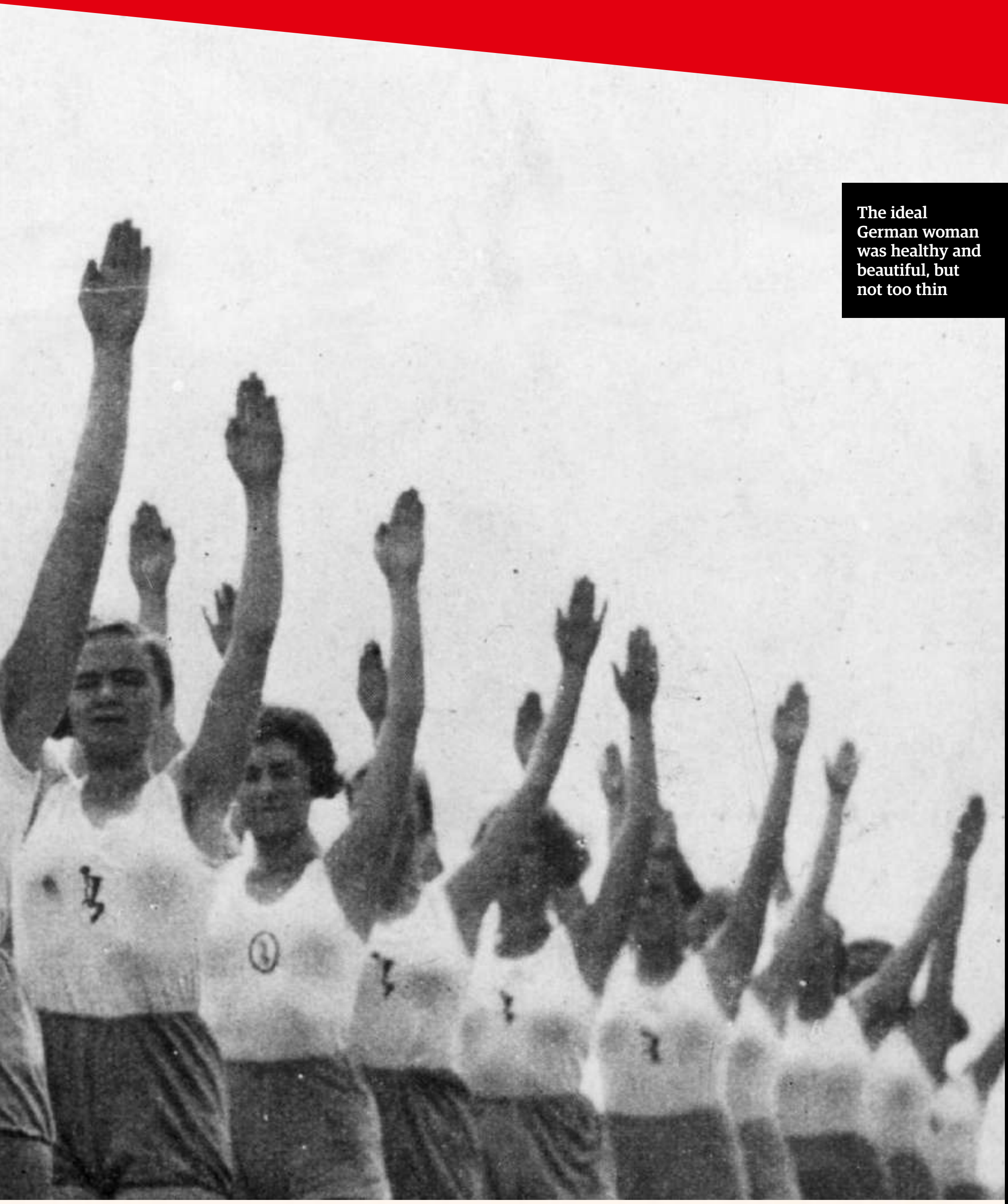
Racial purity and social restructuring were among the key goals of the Nazi Party. Hitler planned to create a country full of tall, strong, Nordic-looking families, each with many children. Childbirth, therefore, was the greatest thing a woman could do to serve the nation. Hitler saw each birth of a 'pure' German child as a step towards his vision of an Aryan master race. "What the man gives in courage on the battlefield, the woman gives in eternal self-sacrifice, in eternal pain and suffering. Every child that a woman brings into the world is a battle, a battle waged for the existence of her people."

Several measures were brought in to raise the birth rate of 'perfect' Germans. Contraception became harder to acquire and abortion was outlawed unless a woman had a 'defect'. The party introduced the Law for the Encouragement of Marriage in 1933. Every newly married couple received a loan of 1,000 Reichsmarks (RM) and was permitted to keep 250RM each time they had a child. Low-income families were given allowances, while childless couples and single people were taxed heavily. Many propaganda images showed a family with the four healthy blonde children each couple was to aim for. The Cross of Honour of the German Mother (or simply the Mother's Cross) was an award given each Mothering Sunday to women who had produced multiple children. The cross came in three classes: bronze for four children, silver for six and gold for eight and above.

When the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour was passed in 1935, marriage between Aryans and people of other races became illegal. Proof of racial background had to be provided before a marriage could take place, so many women were forbidden from marrying the men they loved. For women with physical or mental disabilities and those with other 'undesirable' qualities measures were even more extreme; forced sterilisation and abortions were legalised to ensure that the traits weren't passed on.

Although the Nazis were trying to return to a more traditional society with stable families, production rate was ultimately deemed more important. The Marriage Law of 1938, for example, made divorce easier than ever for certain couples. A man who already had four children with his wife could divorce her without question so he could move on, remarry and have more children with a new woman. Childless couples and couples separated for three years were also free to divorce.

"CHILDBIRTH WAS THE GREATEST THING THAT A WOMAN COULD DO TO SERVE THE NATION"



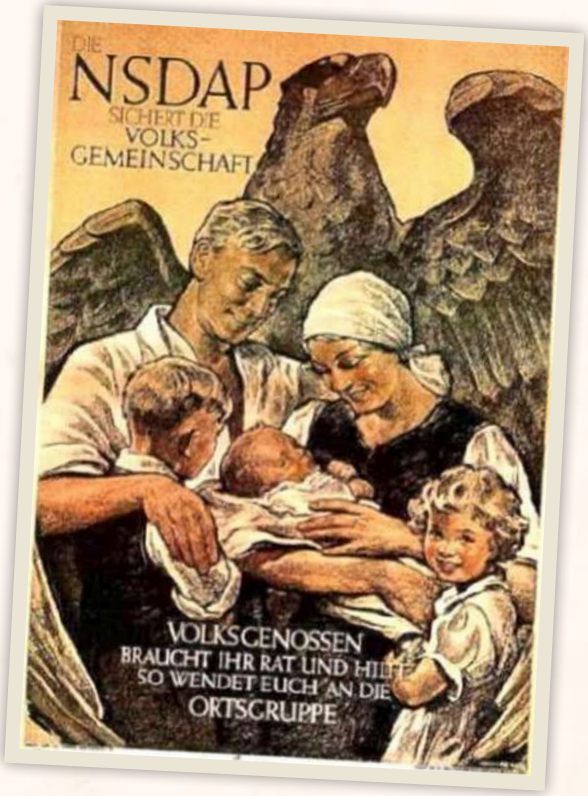
The ideal German woman was healthy and beautiful, but not too thin

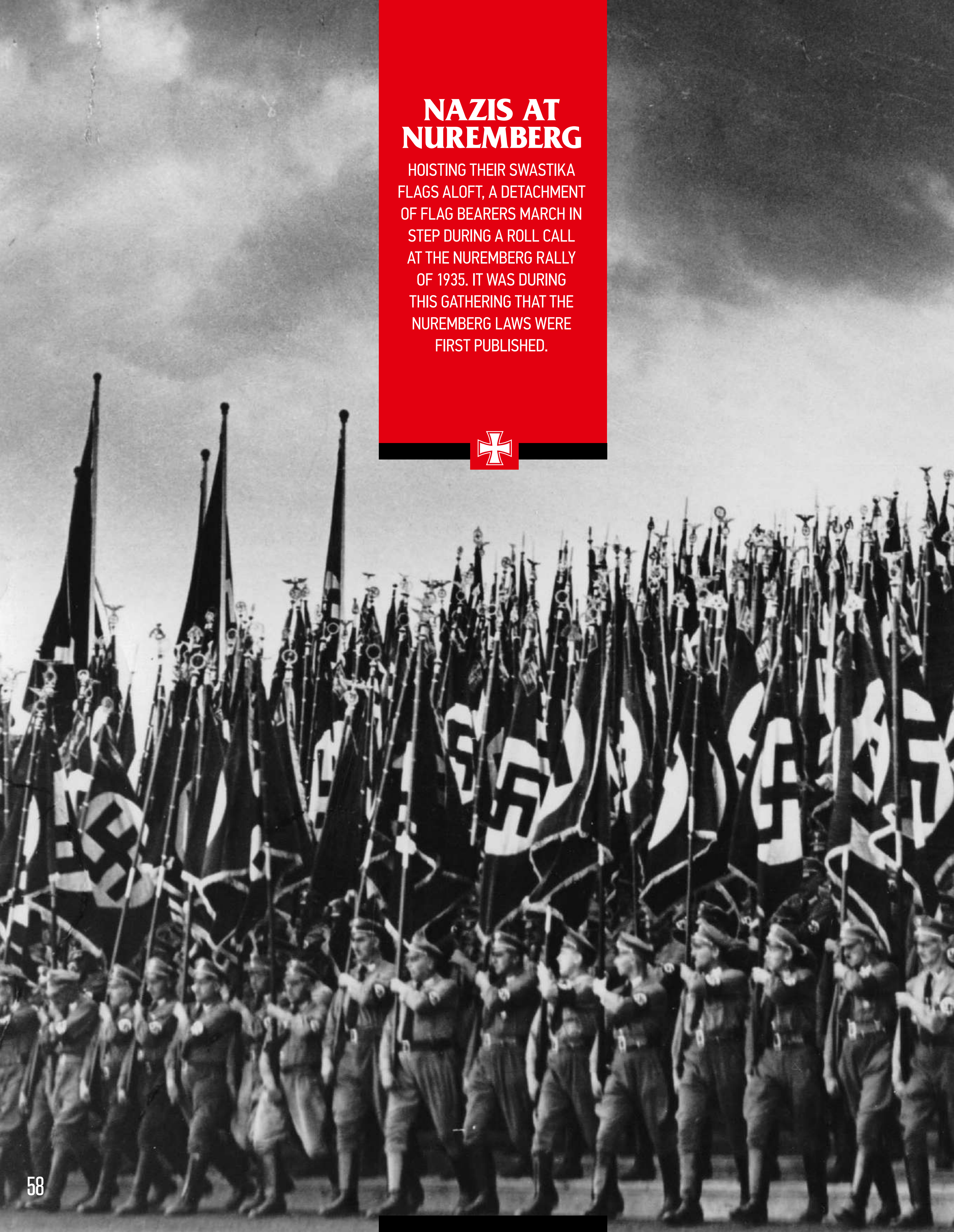
Unsurprisingly, both marriage and divorce rates initially increased after the introduction of the new marriage laws, but there were still fewer births than there had been in the previous decade.

When the birth rate remained lower than anticipated, the Lebensborn association was established to speed up the production of children. Lebensborn means 'fountain of life', and here women without husbands could contribute to the fight for purity by bringing new babies into the world without the judgement they would once have met. Unmarried young women were encouraged to visit these facilities where, after thorough checks of their health and heritage, they would be paired with suitable SS officers - some of them married men. The women were cared for until they gave birth, at which point the babies were taken away. It's thought around 20,000 babies were born as a result of this initiative - many records were later destroyed so the number can only be estimated, and thousands grew up unaware they began life in a Lebensborn facility.

When war broke out, the ideal of the woman taking care of the home and children was no longer viable. Jobs were left empty by men leaving to fight and the Third Reich needed more workers to keep up with essential rearmament. After years of being told to stay at home, women were suddenly encouraged back to the workplace. The Duty Year was introduced in 1937, stating that every woman should serve at least one year of patriotic labour. Not only did they return to the jobs they had been forced out of in the early 1930s, they also filled roles previously unavailable to them. The number of women working in industry soared, and many were conscripted into auxiliary roles in the military.

Although they were taking on jobs in a range of fields, roles of power and influence were still out of reach for most women. A few, like the aviator and test pilot Hanna Reitsch, gained the respect of their party leaders by demonstrating exceptional skill and dedication, but for the most part they were still seen as inferior to men when jobs required decision-making and reasoning. Of the few women to take up positions in the SS, most fulfilled administrative roles - less than 0.7 per cent of concentration camp guards were female.





# NAZIS AT NUREMBERG

HOISTING THEIR SWASTIKA FLAGS ALOFT, A DETACHMENT OF FLAG BEARERS MARCH IN STEP DURING A ROLL CALL AT THE NUREMBERG RALLY OF 1935. IT WAS DURING THIS GATHERING THAT THE NUREMBERG LAWS WERE FIRST PUBLISHED.

# THE FUTURE OF THE THIRD REICH

Inside the youth organisations tasked with preparing the next generation of the Third Reich

If you were a young boy looking for adventure in 1930s Germany, your first port of call was going to be a youth group. You'd have some options, like the Boy Scouts and the Catholic Youth Movement, but they weren't going to last. From 1933, one group ruled the roost: Hitler Jugend, or Hitler Youth. Founded in Munich in 1922 and originally called Jugendbund der NSDAP, its aim was simple - prepare boys for joining the Sturmabteilung, or SA.

The Hitler Youth marketed itself as something that boys would want to join. Posters were put up around towns and cities, and scouting-type activities like camping and hiking brought in the children who wanted some excitement. From 1933 this was the only place to do those activities, because the Boy Scout movement in Germany was abolished. Inevitably, membership rose. At the start of 1933 there were 50,000 members, but this figure skyrocketed to 2 million by the end of the year.

In 1936, membership became compulsory - not that this rule mattered too much, because boys were already under immense pressure to join. Those who hadn't signed up faced taunting from fellow students and even teachers, who would assign them essays with titles such as, 'Why am I not in the Hitler Youth?' The boys could even be refused diplomas. By 1940, membership had risen to 8 million.

The main drive behind the Hitler Youth was to prepare the next generation of the Third Reich. Youth groups meant that children were taken away from their parents, who might disagree with some of the main tenets of Nazi ideology, and indoctrination started young. At meetings and rallies the boys would learn the Nazi views on racial purity and their minds would be opened to anti-Semitism - of course, Jewish boys were banned. Loyalty to the Fatherland meant that some young people reported their parents to the state, and rebellion among them was low.

Boys were split into three groups depending on their age. Those aged six to ten joined Pimpfe, or Little Fellows, where they had fun hiking, rambling and camping. Outdoor sports were the order of the day. Ten year olds would then move on to Deutsche Jungvolk, or German Young People, where the activities became a little more militaristic. The boys would parade and march in their black shorts and tan shirts as well as learning to read maps. Finally, those aged 14 to 18 joined the Hitler Jugend. Here they learned how to use weapons and performed drills to prepare them for life as a soldier. In the years to come, with World War II raging, their training would prove useful.

In the early days of the war, the Hitler Youth worked with anti-aircraft units in Germany, and some members even got to guard Hitler's office. In

PUTZZEUG

## BALDUR VON SCHIRACH

### The man behind the Hitler Youth

Directing the entire youth movement of Nazi Germany was no easy task, and for 12 years that task fell to Baldur von Schirach, the son of a German theatre director and an American. Von Schirach was an early follower of National Socialism, joining the Nazi Party in 1925 when he was a student at the University of Munich. His first foray into youth leadership was in 1929 when he was put in charge of the National German Students League.

Elected to the Reichstag in 1931, he would find himself entering the inner circle of the Führer when he was appointed Reichsjugendführer, or youth leader of the German Reich. Known for his planning skills, he managed to direct a massive youth demonstration in Potsdam that saw 100,000 members of the Hitler Youth and the League of German Maidens march past Hitler for a total of seven hours. He soon created the Jungvolk for boys as young as ten to join.

However, none of this stopped von Schirach from making his way to the front line, as he enlisted in the army in 1940, being awarded the Iron Cross for his service in France. At the end of the war he was captured by Allied troops and his reign of terror over Germany's youth was finally over. He renounced Hitler and was sentenced to 20 years in Spandau Prison, where he remained until his release in September 1966.

Von Schirach (far right) with Hitler, Martin Bormann and Hermann Göring

1940 the youth group was turned into an auxiliary force and helped German fire brigades across the country, as well as assisting with recovery efforts in cities that were hit by Allied bombing raids. But three years later the tide was turning. German forces were dwindling, and there weren't enough new recruits. In 1943 Hitler approved the use of the Hitler Youth as soldiers, and nearly 20,000 teenagers made up part of the German army when the Allies invaded Normandy. About 3,000 of them lost their lives as a result.

Worse was to come. By 1945 the Nazis were desperate, and so they resorted to recruiting boys as young as 12 years old into the military. At the Battle of Berlin, the final push into the Nazi heartland, members of the Hitler Youth made up part of the last line of defence, fighting to the death for their country in the face of the invading Red Army. They were reportedly some of the fiercest soldiers. Out of all the boys who fought that day, only two survived.

The Hitler Youth was disbanded on 10 October 1945 and later made illegal by the German Criminal Code, but it would take much longer for the survivors to reshape their world views. For their entire childhoods they had been taught that loyalty to the Führer came before all else, and many struggled to acclimatise to the new order. When they did they reported a sense of freedom but also anger - after all, they had been denied a normal childhood. But what of Germany's girls?

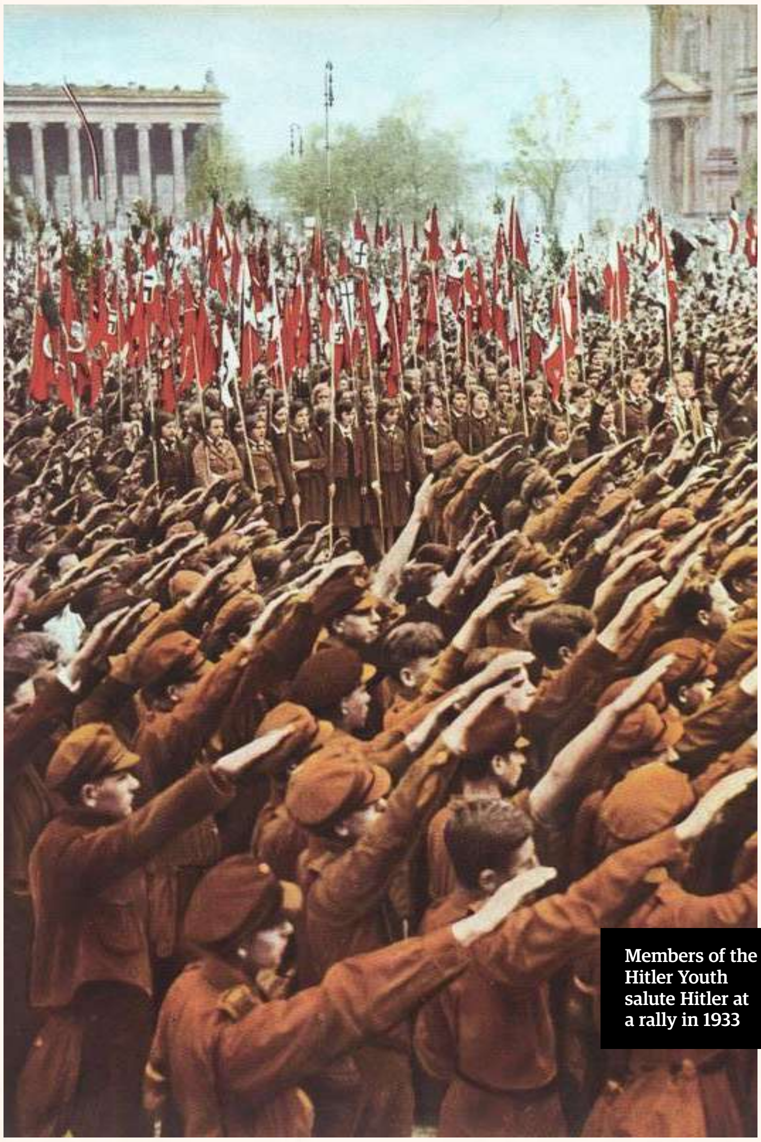
## "MEMBERS OF THE HITLER YOUTH FOUGHT TO THE DEATH AGAINST THE RED ARMY IN BERLIN"

A girl's place in Nazi Germany was simple: she was to learn the more feminine pursuits before growing up and becoming a good German mother. How else would the Third Reich get all its good, strong soldiers? They needn't be concerned with getting a degree or firing a weapon; their only goal in life was to provide a new generation of Germans.

Many different girls' groups were established in the 1920s, until all of them were brought together in 1933. While the boys started their journey in the Nazi Party's young wing at six, girls had to wait until they were ten. That was when they joined Jungmädel, or Young Maidens. Here they were taught good health practices and set on their journey to becoming good mothers and housewives.

When girls turned 14 they were moved up to Deutscher Mädel, or the League of German Maidens, where their training continued until the age of 21. Their initiation in the League of German Maidens would always take place on 20 April, Hitler's birthday. By the end of 1932, membership was up to about 15,000.

Like their brothers, the girls would be indoctrinated in Nazi ideology, with anti-Semitic ideas and the Nazi view of Aryan purity taking a



Members of the Hitler Youth salute Hitler at a rally in 1933

back seat only to a religious fanaticism about Hitler, the man who stood at the centre of everything. Anyone not part of the League would be shunned - conformity was key in Nazi Germany, after all - but in 1939 membership was made compulsory.

Like the Hitler Youth, the girls were told to report anything said at home that was considered to go against the regime. One Holocaust survivor, Dorothy Fleming, wrote that her teacher had said, "At home I want you to keep your eyes and ears open and listen carefully to what your parents, their friends and your brothers and sisters are saying. If you hear them saying anything nasty or critical about our new system, you are to report it to me." The League was the perfect way to put spies into every house.

Members would often volunteer their time for other causes too. The Girls Land Service saw many working in agriculture, while the Women's Labour Service was a six-month period of working in agriculture or domestic services. The latter became compulsory in 1939. Members also sang in choirs - usually folk songs that were in line with Nazi teachings - and choirs were even taken to sing to injured troops during the war. The conformity choral singing provided was in line with Nazi ideology, and this was helped by the League's uniforms. The girls would wear dark blue skirts, brown jackets, black neckerchiefs and white blouses, with make-up strictly forbidden. Any girls who couldn't afford the uniform would find themselves picked on, even after membership became obligatory. To fit in, everyone had to be the same.

Sports were important among both girls and boys - with regards to the girls, strong ones would be able to have more children. They tended to focus on athletics and gymnastics, with some swimming too. But not all of the girls went on to have children with men who were deemed 'appropriate' by the regime; some found other ways to join the war effort.

When cities were bombed, girls ran camps for schoolgirls who had been evacuated. League members in rural areas helped with farming and harvests. As the war went on, some helped the Hitler Youth with the anti-aircraft barriers, and others enlisted in the signal corps of the women's section of the SS. Many made their way to the front line as volunteer nurses, and more volunteered as administrators in their local Nazi offices.

Despite their increasing presence in militarised roles, no one could have expected what happened in 1944. As the tide of the war turned in favour of the Allies, Hitler issued a decree that girls should prepare to fight for their country. They were taught how to lay booby traps and sabotage roads, railways and telephone lines. All-female guerrilla groups were formed to dispel the enemy, and they even defended some cities.

When it came to the Battle of Berlin, the girls were called up to defend the capital to their dying breath alongside the Hitler Youth. As the Red Army overran the city, girls fought tanks and soldiers until the Nazi banners fell. The fate that awaited them was far from pleasant. Many were raped, and those who weren't killed by the invading soldiers carried Soviet babies to term, giving them up for adoption as soon as they were born. A whole generation of German girls were killed or changed forever by the war, half of a generation destroyed by government they lived to serve.

# REARMING GERMANY

The road to World War II was paved with chaos, ambition and hubris, with Germany's rearmament campaign a dangerous cocktail of all three

As the Great War drew to a close in 1918, the Allied powers forced the Germans to sign the Treaty of Versailles, imposing a crushing set of punitive provisions designed to permanently neuter Germany's military capabilities. Aside from paying hefty reparations, Germany would have to disband its military leadership, restrict its army to just 100,000 men and its navy to 15,000 and limit its stocks of weapons, ammunition and naval vessels.

The treaty also stipulated that Germany could only produce armaments at Allied-approved factories in limited amounts, and it strictly forbade the importation of weapons and the production of armoured cars, tanks and military planes. Moreover, conscription was banned and the 50-kilometre Rhineland stretching west of the Rhine was demilitarised.

By signing the treaty the Weimar Government was seen by most Germans to have committed the ultimate betrayal – one designed to forever place the great German nation beneath the yoke of its European neighbours. As Chancellor Scheidemann proclaimed, "What hand would not wither that binds itself and us in these fetters?" However, throughout the 1920s the Weimar Government secretly defied the treaty – reintroducing military training for police, creating the Abwehr military intelligence organisation and reorganising the supposedly disbanded military hierarchy.

The country also saw a rise in paramilitary organisations, vaguely disguised as innocuous youth, labour and athletic groups. Despite being banned, the air force covertly maintained a bare-bones number of pilots and staff, supported by the legitimate aero industry – with airfields hidden from prying eyes. Ships comparable in size and type to those banned were also produced, with the naval fleet disguised as a civilian one.

Meanwhile, Adolf Hitler's star was on the rise, and with him came a dangerous new paradigm to which warfare would be central. In an environment of chaos and mass unemployment, by the time the Nazis rose to power in 1933 the Nazi paramilitary group, the SA, and its subsidiary, the SS, numbered around 500,000. Once elected chancellor, Hitler's priority immediately shifted to re-establishing Germany as Europe's pre-eminent superpower.

In June of that year Reichsbank president and future minister of economics Hjalmar Schacht agreed to finance an eight-year rearmament programme through a company underwritten by the Reichsbank. The country would spend four years building a defensive capacity and then another four building an offensive strike force. To bolster public support and stave off foreign criticism the Nazis exaggerated their sense of vulnerability by fabricating a story about foreign bombers dropping communist leaflets over Germany.

While in attendance at President von Hindenburg's funeral, Hitler claimed to be pursuing a path of peace; this was at odds with his bold assertions of the inevitable oncoming great war prophesied in *Mein Kampf*, and the French were growing wary. The Nazis had already launched the Replacement Shipbuilding Programme, designed to create a new fleet by 1949, and in another show of strength the Nuremberg Rally in 1934 was accompanied by a parade of 100,000 marching soldiers, with numerous military officers in attendance. The event culminated in a showcase of military tactics, drills and equipment, with 130 anti-aircraft searchlights forming a 'cathedral of light'.

In 1935 Hitler decided to step up his rearmament campaign, authorising the formation of the Luftwaffe air force and publicly declaring its existence. With the country just beginning to recover from the throes of economic depression, it still had 5.5 million unemployed. Killing two birds with one stone, the Nazis created the Reich Labour Service, rolling out conscription with a view to having 700,000 soldiers within the Wehrmacht (German army) by 1939.

Despite the elaborate display of German military might at the Nuremberg rally, rearmament remained a pipe dream. While the army had grown beyond its Versailles limitations to boast half a million men, as economist Rolf Wagenführ wrote, "Public views of the scale of armament were very much exaggerated."

Steel production had slowed down and rubber factories were operating with just two months' supplies. However, Hitler was more than happy to let his foreign counterparts overestimate his abilities. Winston Churchill claimed that German rearmament expenditure stood at 12 billion Reichsmark (RM), when in truth it was closer to 5 billion. Eager to maintain the illusion of power, the Nazis painted fleets of civilian aircraft with military patterns and put on air shows. While the

## ALBERT SPEER'S ARMAMENT MIRACLE

### Hitler's architect kept Germany in the war against all odds

With the rapid defeat of the USSR having failed to materialise and Allied bombings decimating Germany, by 1942 the situation was becoming desperate for Hitler. However, his appointment of his architect Albert Speer as minister of armaments and war production did offer hope, kickstarting what would later be dubbed an 'armament miracle' as production apparently tripled in two years. In the first half of 1942 alone the armaments industry doubled its output, and the production of locomotives rocketed from 1,918 to 5,343 in two years.

Speer boosted productivity by limiting the types of weapons being made, which helped to streamline mass production, and scaling back minor design adjustments to save time refining production equipment. Moreover, aesthetics were stripped back in favour of faster manufacturing. Speer also forced companies to share technological secrets to improve efficiency across the country. The government renegotiated with its suppliers, moving from cost-plus contracts to fixed-price contracts, thereby incentivising them to lower their production costs – these measures had already been rolled out in the aircraft industry before Speer's appointment.

Some argue that Speer overstated his contribution to these improvements using indices based on particularly low 1941 figures. However, having previously masterminded the Nuremberg rallies and 1936 Olympics, Speer worked with Goebbels on a propaganda campaign centred around the slogan, 'The best weapons bring victory'.

## “CONSCRIPTION WAS ROLLED OUT WITH A VIEW TO HAVING 700,000 SOLDIERS BY 1939”

Germans were not ready to mass-produce military planes, they showcased bombers such as the Do-17 ‘flying pencil’, seemingly faster than any of its French or British counterparts.

Meanwhile, the commercial He 111, used by Lufthansa, which had been built with a large smoking compartment, now revealed its true purpose – the smoking room had been converted into a bomb bay. Legendary American aviator Charles Lindbergh was invited to tour German facilities and fly the country’s aircraft and left proclaiming, “Germany is undoubtedly the most powerful nation in the world in military aviation, and her margin of leadership is increasing with each month that passes.”

The Nazi rearmament campaign crossed a critical juncture in March 1936. With Britain and France in disarray over how to deal with Mussolini’s colonial incursions into Abyssinia, Hitler sent 22,000 men into the demilitarised Rhineland. The 19 infantry battalions, 13 artillery groups and 54 planes joined local police for a combined force of 36,500 that the French incorrectly estimated as standing at 295,000.

Due to a chronic lack of fuel and rubber, the Nazis relied heavily on horses, taking up to 750,000 into the USSR

Hitler justified the move by pointing to the Franco-Soviet pact ratified the month prior. Having previously espoused the Nazi desire for international friendship and peace, Hitler declared, “In accordance with the fundamental right of a nation to secure its frontiers and ensure its possibilities of defence, the German Government have today restored the full and unrestricted sovereignty of Germany in the demilitarised zone of the Rhineland.”

Once again the British and the French failed to create a united front – the former favouring appeasement and the latter too weak to mount a military response alone. As Mussolini left the League of Nations and Spain descended into civil war, lines were beginning to be drawn in the sand.

Hitler had made the ultimate gamble – had Britain and France met the Germans with force the Nazis would most likely have been routed and forced from the Rhineland with, as Hitler’s interpreter Paul Schmidt said, “our tail between our legs”. Instead they missed their last great chance to nip the German threat in the bud. The Nazis had instead shattered the Treaty of Versailles’ military manacles and thrown down the political gauntlet, setting in motion a deadly series of events.

Emboldened, the Nazis secretly sent scores of ‘volunteers’ to fight in the Spanish Civil War, directly in contravention of the Treaty of Versailles, which prohibited Germany from sending armies abroad. Armed with fraudulent papers, Spanish money and uniforms, more than 14,000 Nazi pilots gained almost three years’ experience in Spain as they tested out the military capabilities of the Messerschmitt Bf 109.

While the Nazis produced a public ‘white budget’, where military spending stood at 360 million RM in 1936, the secret ‘black budget’ stood at more than 3 billion RM. That spring, increasingly concerned about the Red Army to the east – whose numbers had swelled to 1 million – and the rearmament of France and Britain to the west, Hitler instructed Göring to ready the army and economy for war within just four years. Pursuing a path of self-sufficiency, Göring would be in charge of investing in the synthetic production of rubber, iron, petrol, industrial fats and textiles.

Upon announcing the second four-year plan, Hitler asserted that war was inevitable, that it was Germany’s task to “defend Europe against Bolshevism” and that “a final solution of the food problem only can come through an expansion of living space” – a reference to his policy of Lebensraum.

The army began to dramatically scale up its expectations, building a field army of 3.6 million men by 1940, even larger than the Kaiser’s army in 1914. The strongest infantry divisions would be given around 600 trucks, 400 cars and 400

# THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

### A lack of coherency from the League of Nations opened up Germany's path to war

While Germany began rearming itself under a cloak of secrecy, Hitler publicly declared his intent in 1935 – formally announcing the Luftwaffe and rolling out public conscription. However, Germany's defiance of Versailles went unchecked, with the British even ratifying a naval treaty that included battle-ready submarines.

The previous winter, American journalist William Shirer wrote there was "much talk here that Germany is secretly arming, though it is difficult to get definite dope, and if you did get it and sent it, you'd probably be expelled". Winston Churchill went so far as to speculate the German air force had grown to match Britain's, a fact Hitler was more than happy to reinforce when visited by British politicians Sir John Simon and Anthony Eden.

The real turning point was Hitler's remilitarisation of the Rhineland. While France was equally outraged and terrified, it could not mount armed opposition without the help of Britain, who instead opted for a path of appeasement. Though Churchill warned in 1936 that "the era of procrastination, of half-measures, of soothing and baffling expedients, of delays, is coming to a close", with the United States in isolationist mode, Hitler emerged from his most vulnerable state emboldened and ready to march into the German-speaking territories and beyond.

**"55 BILLION REICHSMARKS WAS SPENT ON REARMAMENT IN THE SIX YEARS LEADING UP TO 1939"**

motorcycles. Alongside the 120,000 trucks would be 630,700 horses, enough for one in four soldiers. With more than 35 billion RM set aside for the army from 1937 to 1941, only five per cent was marked for land vehicles – almost a third was set aside for artillery, guns and ammunition, and nine per cent for fortifications.

By 1938, 80 per cent of goods and services purchased by Germany were procured for the Wehrmacht. Half of the Nazi military budget was spent on the Luftwaffe, with monthly aircraft production rising from 30 in 1933 to 425 in 1936, before rising by a further 60 per cent. After 1938 the country shifted its tank production to the Mark III in 1938 and Mark IV in 1939, producing 247 tanks in three months alone.

In the six years leading up to 1939 Hitler boasted of spending 90 billion RM on rearmament. Conservative estimates suggest a more accurate figure of around 55 billion RM – just over half of all public expenditure and ten per cent of gross GDP. The country now enjoyed full employment, and subsequent rearmament had helped lift production 25 per cent higher than 1929 levels.

At the dawn of World War II, as the Nazis prepared to invade Poland, they were producing 500 aircraft a month – boasting a powerful fleet of 1,000 bombers and 1,050 fighters. Britain and France had a combined 1,800 bombers and 950 fighters. That year the Nazis embarked on a programme to build six huge battleships, 249 U-boats and eight long-range cruisers, with a budgeted 33 billion RM being set aside for almost 800 ships.

Though it appeared Hitler was more than ready to wage total war, all was not as it seemed. While the Germans were now spending 15 per cent of their GDP on military expenditure, so were the British, and the Americans were spending ten per cent. For Germany, with tax rates already

In March 1936 Hitler marched 22,000 men into the demilitarised Rhineland, essentially crossing the Rubicon, to no response

high and the country reluctant to borrow more funds, rearmament on such a massive scale was unsustainable. The country was also spending heavily on highways and public works. Having approved a final 3 billion RM for rearmament in 1938, the Reichsbank president Schacht was dismissed the next year for refusing to offer any more. Following his departure the country overhauled the economy, rolling out cost control on all public contracts and abolishing the gold standard, thereby giving the Wehrmacht access to a black budget of 21 billion in 1939 alone, with roughly half given to the navy and Luftwaffe and half to the army.

Hitler's strategy had been to expand his Lebensraum piece by piece with a series of brief blitzkrieg wars. With America on the sidelines, Germany would slowly annex Western Europe and draw upon its resources to prepare for a greater war with the Soviet Union in the future. In truth, Germany only had enough crucial resources, such as fuel oil, iron ore, magnesium and gasoline, to sustain a few months of fighting. The Germans had just 2,439 tanks in 1940 with which to face 3,254 French tanks and a combined total of 4,200 Allied tanks. While Göring announced plans to expand the Luftwaffe to 21,000 planes, they never far surpassed 5,000. Meanwhile, at their peak Britain and the USSR would boast 8,300 and 17,000 respectively, and the US 21,000.

Having prioritised the navy and Luftwaffe, after some initial success and a doubling of production in 1940, in the second half of 1941 army production dropped by 30 per cent. As Hitler's series of brief conflicts unexpectedly blossomed into total warfare, the inept scale and manner of the Nazi military investments were eventually revealed - especially once the Soviets began to turn the tide on the Eastern Front.

In a telling move, as the Americans poured resources into the development of the atom bomb, the Nazis decided to seek out more cost-effective solutions to their problems. Ships were confined to the coast and fjords of Norway as planes were recalled to defend the Fatherland in the face of sustained bombing. Even after the catastrophic failure at Stalingrad, Germany only stepped up its war production in a meaningful way towards the height of Allied bombings, tripling from 1942 to 1944 - but it would prove too little too late. Rather than expanding the country would push its war machine into top gear, battling all the way back to its own capital, sustaining itself just enough to drag millions to their graves along the way.

# NIGHT OF THE LONG KNIVES

## GERMANY, 30 JUNE – 2 JULY 1934

## Timeline

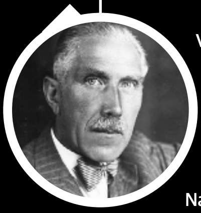
**28 FEBRUARY 1934**

Adolf Hitler orders the SA to become subordinate to the Reichswehr. SA leader Ernst Röhm agrees but privately vows to defy the command.

**20 APRIL 1934**

Hermann Göring transfers control of the Gestapo to SS chief Himmler, while the latter quietly restructures his organisation into a force independent of the SA.

**17 JUNE 1934**



Vice Chancellor von Papen speaks at Marburg University against SA terror. His subsequent threat of resignation risks the end of the Nazi Government.

**30 JUNE 1934**

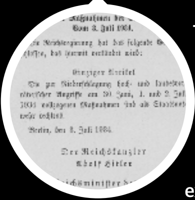
Hitler arrives at the Hotel Hanselbauer in Bad Wiessee. Röhm is arrested along with the SA leadership and taken to Stadelheim Prison in Munich.

Hitler salutes a parade of SA troopers in 1930

**1 JULY 1934**

Given the option of an 'honourable suicide', Röhm refuses. At 2.40pm he is executed in his cell by two SS men.

**3 JULY 1934**



The Law Regarding Measures for Emergency State Defence is passed, retroactively legalising the extrajudicial killings.

## WHAT WAS IT?

After more than a year in power, the Nazi regime closed ranks. It undertook a 'blood purge' of the party's paramilitary wing, the Sturmabteilung (SA), commonly known as the Brownshirts. The SA's leader Ernst Röhm was personally arrested by Adolf Hitler in the early hours of 30 June in a hotel outside Munich. Members of his entourage – found suggestively sharing beds – were also rounded up and executed. This was immediately followed by similar action in Berlin with Hermann Göring dispatching elite Schutzstaffel (SS) execution squads to take out "undisciplined and disobedient characters and asocial or diseased elements".

At least 85 people are known to have died, with the Nazis taking the opportunity to also settle scores with old political rivals. Former chancellor Kurt von Schleicher was gunned down in his home with his wife. Members of the key Catholic Centre Party, a Bavarian politician essential to the failure of Hitler's 1923 Beer Hall Putsch and even a music critic (in a case of mistaken identity) were also killed.

## WHY DID IT HAPPEN?

As the violent vanguard of the National Socialist movement, the Brownshirts were essential to the party's ascent to power. By 1934, the ranks of the fighting organisation had swelled to around 4 million, dwarfing the muzzled Reichswehr, Germany's military.

Röhm's frequent talk of absorbing the army alarmed the conservative generals and President Hindenburg, and his calls for a 'second revolution', emphasising the socialist aspect of National Socialism, made him few political allies. The unruly peacetime behaviour of SA members persisted as a threat to the stability that the Nazis had promised to usher in with their leadership. Rumours of a Röhm-led coup against Hitler were stoked with evidence of French involvement that had been manufactured by the SS. The old guard had outlived their usefulness.

Acting against Röhm enabled Hitler to demonstrate his power while demanding allegiance, consolidating his control of the party and presenting himself as the solution to the chaos the Nazis had done so much to ferment.

## WHO WAS INVOLVED?

### Adolf Hitler

**20 April 1889 – 30 April 1945**

Hitler personally led the putsch, intent on confronting the SA threat and securing himself as the arbiter of Germany's destiny.

### Ernst Röhm

**28 November 1887 – 1 July 1934**

Once Hitler's trusted accomplice, Röhm's fall from grace took him to an ignominious end in a cold prison cell.

### Heinrich Himmler

**7 October 1900 – 23 May 1945**

Proving his allegiance and strengthening his position within the Nazi hierarchy, Himmler directed the SS intervention against Röhm.

© Getty Images

# THE NAZI OLYMPICS

## BERLIN 1936

For 16 days in the summer of 1936, the doors of the Third Reich opened to the world in one of the most memorable Olympics of all time

On 26 April 1931, Berlin was pulled out of the hat at the 29th session of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The city had been chosen to host the 11th modern Olympic Games and the German bid had beaten Barcelona and Istanbul. To the IOC, Weimar Germany was an ideal venue. A country whose stability had ebbed and flowed since the guns fell silent on the Western Front, an Olympics held in the heart of Europe would reap huge social and diplomatic benefits. However, just like the rest of the world, they could not have foreseen what would happen just under two years later.

The ascension of the Nazi Party to power in Germany in 1933 sent shockwaves around the world, not least to the IOC. News of strict racial laws had been filtering out of Germany and a mass boycott was on the cards. As a result, the IOC forced the Third Reich to tone down its extremist ideology and, on the surface at least, the Nazis complied. Adolf Hitler was no sports fan but Joseph Goebbels convinced the Führer that it was a unique opportunity to promote Aryan ideals across the globe. The stage was set for a Nazi Olympics and the triumphant return of a new Germany to the international community.

### IN NUMBERS

**6**

The most medals won by an Olympian: Germany's Konrad Frey

**3,963**

Number of athletes who competed. 3,632 were men, 331 were women

**49**

nations competed at the Olympics, the most ever at the time

**72**

Age of the oldest participant: Austria's Arthur von Pongracz

**131.5 HECTARES**

Size of the specially constructed Reich Sports Field

**7.5 million Reichsmarks**

Total ticket revenue

**42 MILLION REICHSMARKS**

Cost of the Reich Sports Field Complex

Germany had never held an Olympic Games before. Berlin had been chosen as the host of the 1916 games but it was scuppered by the escalation of World War I. The German Olympic Committee was intent on outshining the efforts of the Los Angeles 1932 Games, which suffered poor attendances and troubled finances due to the Great Depression. Germany went all out in its preparations for the Games, with a new 100,000-seat stadium and 150 other Olympic buildings built especially for the event. The 'Olympiastadion' was one of the biggest stadiums in the world and part of the all-new Reich Sports Field complex.

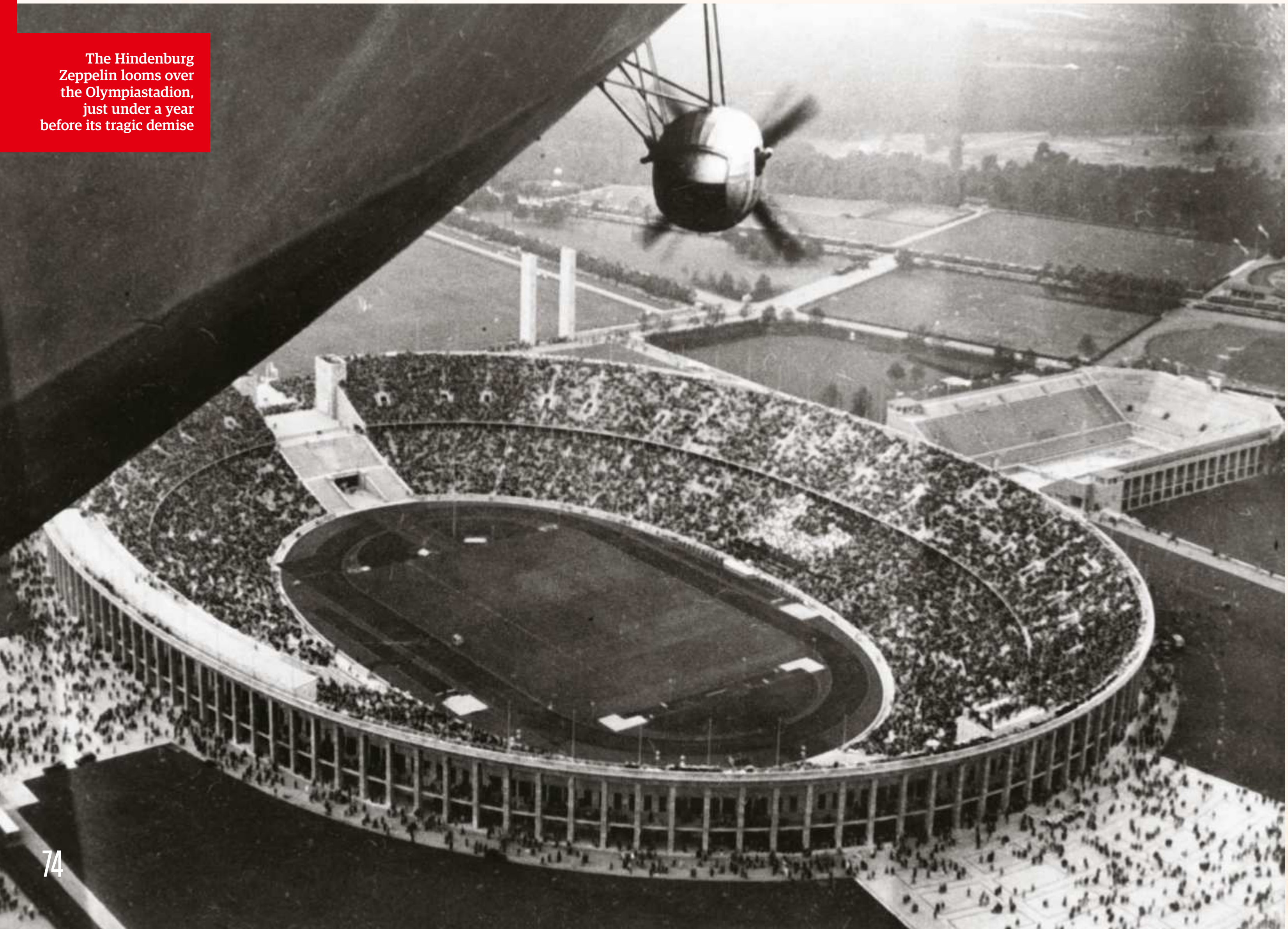
Away from the impressive stadium complex, Berlin was being kitted out as a grand host city. Along the Unter den Linden Street and outside the Reich's Chancellery, huge statues were erected echoing classic Greek and Roman symbolism. The Berlin Summer Olympics was to be the first to be televised and benefited from the videography of Leni Riefenstahl, who was handed a cool $7 million and entrusted with a team of 33 camera operators to film the event. On arrival, the international media were no doubt impressed by the Nazi welcome, with transmitting vans and the equipment to broadcast in 28 languages, as well as Zeppelins to carry newsreel footage to other European cities for the rapid transmission of events to more than 41 countries.

The acid test for the Germans was gaining the trust of the international community. Boycott threats came from the US, Britain, France, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands and Sweden. Even within Germany itself, not all were behind the idea of hosting the Olympics. This dissent primarily came from the left wing of German politics, with *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (The Worker Illustrated) firmly opposed. One man who did support American participation was the president of the United States Olympic Committee, Avery Brundage. Championing the idea that "the Olympic Games belong to the athletes and not the politicians," after a trip to Berlin he claimed that from what he had witnessed, Jews and other supposed enemies of the Nazi state were being treated fairly.

Hitler and Minister of Propaganda Goebbels toned down their true intentions to Brundage and the watching world. Since the establishment of Nazi totalitarian control, all Jewish athletes had been banned from attending sporting facilities and expelled from competition. Come 1936, all traces of anti-Semitic propaganda had been hidden away and a false image of Nazi Germany successfully established. All anti-Semitic propaganda had been removed, Nazi tabloid *Der Stürmer* had been taken off newsstands and Olympic flags hung in the streets beside swastikas. Even the SA brownshirts greeted visitors with an uncharacteristic friendly smile. The Nazi hierarchy performed an elaborate cover up that even managed to hide the fact that the Jewish president of the German Olympic committee Dr Theodor Lewald had been replaced by SA member Hans von Tschammer und Osten, as well as the 600 Romani gypsies who had been arrested and forcibly relocated to the outskirts of Berlin between a cemetery and a sewage dump.

With all these measures in place, the idea of a boycott melted away, with only the Soviet Union (who had not been present at any of the Olympics it had been invited to) not attending what would be

**"THE OLYMPIASTADION WAS ONE OF THE BIGGEST IN THE WORLD"**

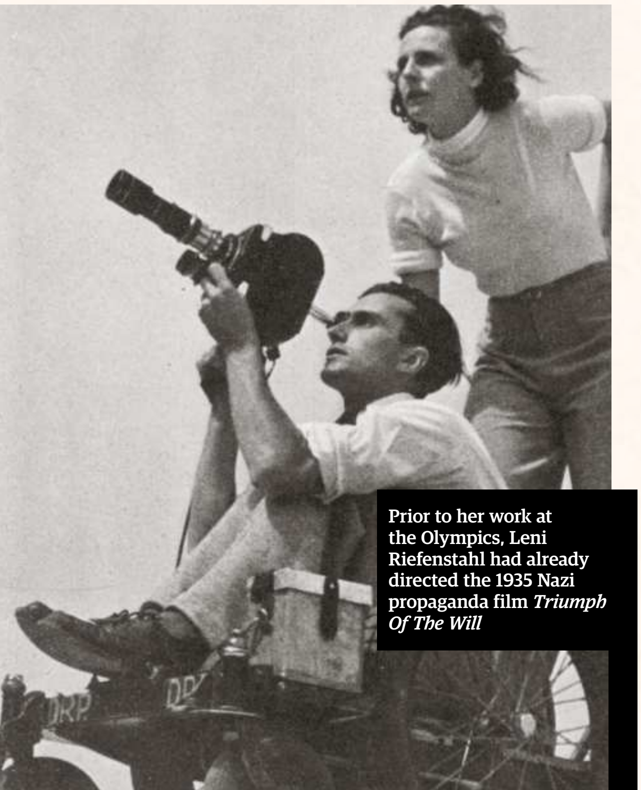


The Hindenburg Zeppelin looms over the Olympiastadion, just under a year before its tragic demise a world event. Goebbels had successfully drawn a curtain over the worst of Nazi oppression.

1936 saw the advent of the Olympic torch relay. The brainchild of sports administrator Carl Diem, 3,422 runners ran one kilometre each as the torch made the journey all the way from Olympia, Greece, the spiritual home of the ancient Greek Olympics, to Berlin. The relay travelled through Greece, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Austria and Czechoslovakia, countries that would later side with the Axis or come under its occupation during World War II. The man who carried the flame for the final leg was Siegfried Eifrig, who personified the link the Nazis believed the Third Reich had with the great civilisations of antiquity. Tall, blonde and blue-eyed, he brought the torch into the Olympiastadion and the games got under way on 1 August.

The two anthems *Deutschland über Alles* and *Horst Wessel Lied* rang out around the stadium as the Hindenburg airship did a flyby in what was a tremendous yet carefully rehearsed spectacle. A key moment came later as Hitler raised his arm in salute. Athletes from roughly half of the countries involved - including Afghanistan, Austria, Bulgaria, Bolivia, Bermuda and Iceland - all saluted back while other nations, including Britain and the US,

American divers Dorothy Poynton-Hill and Velma Dunn smile for the camera with Käthe Koehler of Germany



Prior to her work at the Olympics, Leni Riefenstahl had already directed the 1935 Nazi propaganda film *Triumph Of The Will*

# BIRTH OF AN AMERICAN HERO

Jesse Owens' daughter Marlene Rankin explains how the Olympics changed her father's life

**What do you know about the 1936 Olympics? Did your father talk about it?**

Since I was not born then, I only know what I have read, seen on film and gleaned from speeches I have heard my father make about his experience there. In our home, the 1936 Olympics was not a topic of conversation. There was very little mention of it ever, but there was always a room in the house where photos from it, and my father's trophies and medals, were displayed.

**Do you think your father's achievements and contributions in Berlin have been remembered in the right spirit over the years?**

I think that my father's achievements and contributions in Berlin have been remembered in the right spirit, depending on who you ask. He was a rather shy young man who was extremely talented athletically and who loved what he did. He went to the Olympics to compete with the best the world had to offer. He was a humble young man who believed in himself and his teammates and the promise of America. He was a team player and had a tremendous sense of fair play.

**There are conflicting views over whether Adolf Hitler refused to shake your father's hand or acknowledged him in any way or not. Did Jesse ever speak of it and what is the truth?**

I've heard my father say in speeches when asked the Hitler question, "I went to Berlin to run and not to shake hands with Hitler. I am here today and where Hitler is, I don't know or care." So I would conclude from that he did not shake hands with Hitler.

**How do you think what happened at the 1936 Olympics changed your family's life?**

What happened in the 1936 Olympics made Jesse Owens. He became a hero to the American black community, an international star for his athletic accomplishments, and a celebrity to the American community at large. As such, it shaped his life. Though he never competed as an amateur athlete again, it placed him in an environment of opportunity that probably would not have been available to him had he not accomplished what he did in Berlin. His life became a series of tried opportunities that allowed him to find his strengths beyond athletics where he could make a living for himself and his family. His personality, charisma and new skills catapulted him into a celebrity life. The Jesse Owens Foundation was founded in 1980 after his untimely death by friends and family to perpetuate the spirit of Jesse Owens and his belief that the youth of any country is its greatest resource.

The Games was one to remember for Jesse Owens who starred on both track and field, infuriating Hitler in the process

# THE STARS OF BERLIN

The competitors who lit up the XI Olympiad

## 01 Hendrika (Rie) Mastenbroek

The first female athlete to win four medals at one Olympics, 17-year-old Mastenbroek was a talented Dutch swimmer at all strokes.

**Achievements: gold medal 100-metre freestyle, gold medal 400-metre relay, gold medal 400-metre freestyle, silver medal 100-metre backstroke**

## 02 Helene Mayer

The only athlete with Jewish ancestry to make the German team, Mayer justified her selection with some skilled fencing, duelling with her rival Hungary's Ilona Schacherer.

**Achievement: silver medal fencing**

## 03 Sohn Kee-Chung

Long-distance runner Sohn was a Korean forced to run under the flag of Japan. He signed the Olympic roster with a Korean flag in defiance.

**Achievement: gold medal marathon**

## 04 Jack Lovelock

Kiwi John Edward Lovelock had a rivalry with American runner Glenn Cunningham and both jostled for the top spot at the 1936 Olympics, with Lovelock winning the battle.

**Achievement: gold medal 1,500 metres**

## 05 Dhyan Chand

Considered one of the greatest field hockey players of all time, Indian Chand captained his nation and had already played in the 1928 and 1932 Olympics.

**Achievement: gold medal field hockey**

## 06 Helen Stephens

Helen Stephens left the 1936 Olympics undefeated and with two gold medals. She later served in the US Marine Corps during World War II.

**Achievements: gold medal 100 metres, gold medal 4x100-metre relay**

## 07 Majorie Gestring

At the tender age of just 13, American Gestring wowed the German crowds and became the youngest ever female Olympic champion at women's springboard diving.

**Achievement: gold medal women's springboard diving**

## 08 Inge Sørensen

Even younger than Gestring was 12-year-old Inge Sørensen, who managed a bronze medal in swimming for her native Denmark.

**Achievement: bronze medal 200-metre breaststroke**

## 09 Luz Long

The German Olympian is remembered for his battles with American Jesse Owens. Hitler was incensed at the two Olympians being arm in arm during the awards ceremony.

**Achievement: silver medal long jump**

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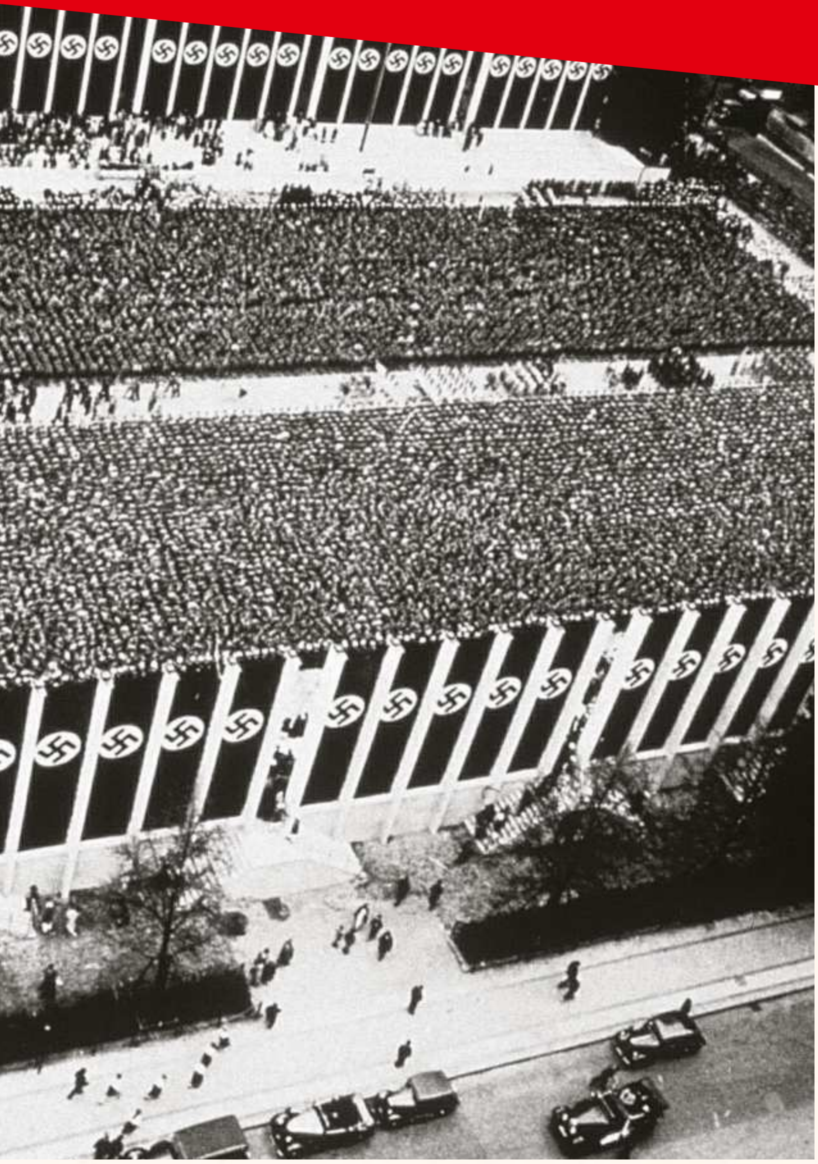
Goebbels and his propaganda machine were intent on making the Olympics a spectacle that showed-off the Third Reich to the world

did not, receiving jeers from the largely German crowd in the process. The Americans even went one step further by refusing to lower the Stars and Stripes to Hitler, which infuriated the Führer. If the first day of the Olympics proved anything to the world, it was that the German people were seemingly devoted to the Nazi regime.

The day after the excitement of the opening ceremony, it was down to serious sporting business. The star of the show was undoubtedly Jesse Owens, who would win four gold medals in the 100 metres, 200 metres, 4x100-metre relay and long jump. The African-American's exploits infuriated Hitler, and he was labelled 'Negro Owens' by the German media, with all US black competitors branded 'Black Auxiliaries'. The German people, however, were the polar opposite to the journalists, chanting Owens' name from the stands and pestering him for autographs at every opportunity. The Berlin Olympics was also the first year that basketball was played at a Games. It was won by the US, who began their domination of the sport by beating Canada 19-8 in the final.

Despite not selecting world-class athletes such as tennis ace Daniel Prenn and formidable boxer Erich Seelig due to their Jewish roots, the Germans finished top of the medals table for the first and only time with a haul of 89 medals, far ahead of the US in second place with 56. It wasn't just the Germans not picking their competitors on talent



Hitler was initially sceptical of Nazi Germany hosting the games but saw it as an opportunity to further his twisted ideology

# "GERMANY FINISHED TOP OF THE MEDALS TABLE FOR THE FIRST AND ONLY TIME IN ITS HISTORY"

alone though. American Jews Marty Glickman and Sam Stoller were both told they would not be running in the 4x100-metre relay and watched on as their nation triumphed with gold. Rumours persist that Brundage pressured the US coaching team to drop the two men, allegedly in fear of upsetting Hitler.

Hungary trailed Germany and the US in third place with ten golds, while Britain only managed tenth place. Japan were the only other nation other than the US able to break a European monopoly of the podium.

A sad story to come from the Olympics was the death of Romanian boxer Nicolae Berechet. After being knocked out in the first round of the featherweight competition, he died mysteriously of blood poisoning a few days later.

Away from the hubbub of the Olympiastadion, IOC President Henri de Baillet-Latour laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. 1 August 1936 came days after the 22nd anniversary of the deployment of troops in the European theatre of World War I. The symbolism of this action was to demonstrate peace, making the outbreak of war three years later all the more tragic. A flamboyant opening ceremony and gestures of peace had given the world false hope of a peaceful and non-aggressive Nazi Germany.

The Berlin Games concluded on 16 August. Germany had succeeded in hosting an event that portrayed the nation in a positive light to the world, and the German victory in the medals table was a huge propaganda boost to the Nazi Party and their Aryan ideals. Leni Riefenstahl shot about 305,000 metres of film, which took a painstaking 18 months to edit. The result was the four-hour film *Olympia*, which was released in April 1938 and showed just how the Olympics were manipulated to uphold Nazi Aryan beliefs.

Hitler may not have been a sports fan, but he was so impressed with the Games that he reportedly claimed, "In 1940, the Olympic Games will take place in Tokyo, but thereafter they will take place in Germany for all time to come." Architect Albert Speer was even tasked with designing a 400,000-seat stadium for every future Olympics, plans that would have been put in motion had Nazi Germany won World War II.

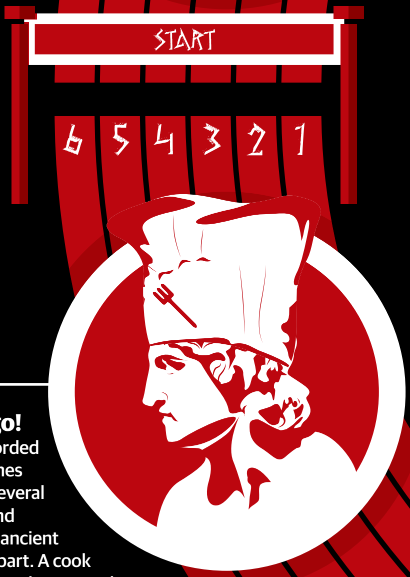
The Olympic ideals of international co-operation may have been against what the Führer stood for, but even a national socialist despot could not fail to appreciate the political opportunities afforded to Nazi Germany by the Games. The success of the Olympics was a huge propaganda boost for Germany, and along with the Italian victories in both the 1934 and 1938 football World Cups, helped prove that these new dictatorships could rival traditional democracies on the playing field.

Just two days after the end of the Games, the Nazi Party was rocked by the death of Captain Wolfgang Fuerstner, the head of the Olympic Village. Although the story was initially covered up, it was revealed that the Jewish Fuerstner had committed suicide after learning he would be a victim of the returning Nuremberg Laws. The brains behind the expertly designed village had been forced to play second fiddle to the non-Jewish Werner Gilsa, and although the laws had been toned down during the Olympics, they were to be implemented once again.

In the coming years, the Third Reich unleashed the fury of the Wehrmacht on the world and any social progress made during the 1936 Berlin Olympics was lost. War was brewing, and attention soon turned from the track to the battlefield as the clouds of conflict once again amassed over Europe.

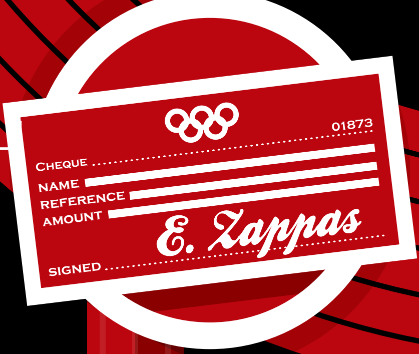
# HISTORY OF THE OLYMPICS

Despite a brief interlude of a few thousand years, the Games are still going strong



**776 BCE**

**Get set, go!**
The first recorded Olympic Games take place. Several city-states and kingdoms of ancient Greece take part. A cook called Coroebus becomes the first Olympic champion when he wins the only event – a 192-metre running race.

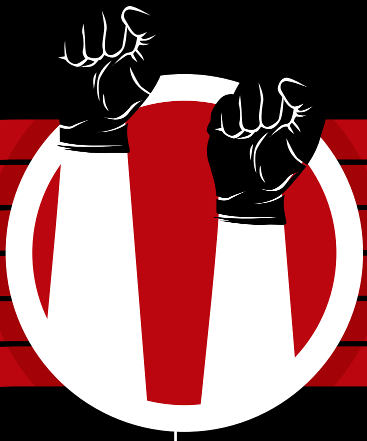


**1859**

**A fresh start**
Greek businessman Evangelis Zappas sponsors the first modern Olympic Games in Athens. Athletes from Greece and the Ottoman Empire participate. He also provides funding for the refurbishment of the ancient stadium.

**1890**

**Birth of the IOC**
French historian Baron Pierre de Coubertin founds the International Olympic Committee (IOC) with the aim of establishing an internationally rotating Olympic Games.



**1968**

**Making a statement**
African-American medallists Tommy Smith and John Carlos lift gloved fists in a Black Power salute as the US national anthem is played. Smith later says, "If I win, I am American, not a black American. But if I did something bad, then they would say I am a Negro."

**1972**

**The Munich massacre**
17 people are killed when members of the Palestinian terrorist group Black September abduct Israeli team members. The victims include a police officer who dies during a failed rescue attempt.

Welcome to the 1984
Olympic
Games

**1984**

**Thrifty hosts**
In order to restrict costs, Los Angeles uses only existing facilities except for a swimming stadium and velodrome paid for by sponsors. As a result, the Games make $225 million in profit.

**1956**

**Live from Melbourne**

The Olympics Games are internationally broadcast for the first time. Institutions present include the BBC, NBC, CBS and United Press.

**1948**

**Disabled athletes prove their worth**

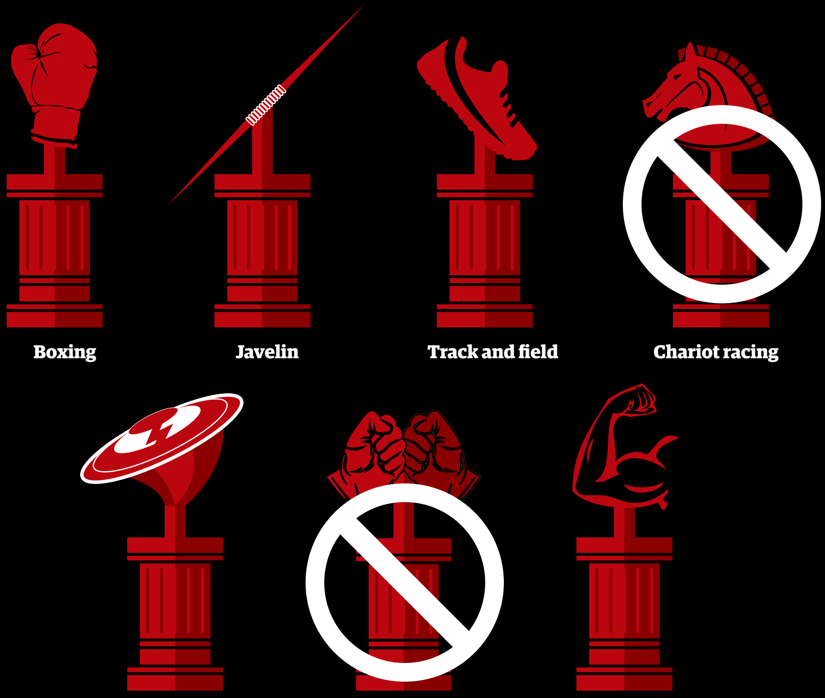
The Paralympics are created to promote the rehabilitation of soldiers after World War II. They are initially called the International Wheelchair Games.

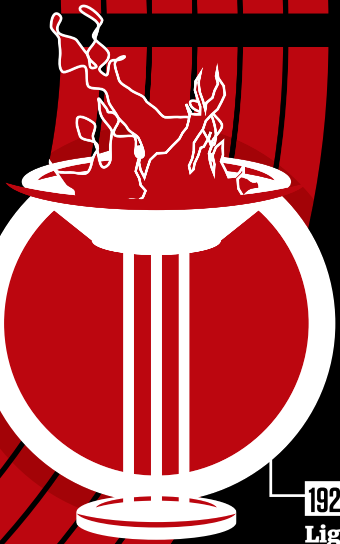
**1936**

**Nazi delusions**

At the infamous Nazi Olympics, Adolf Hitler watches Jesse Owens damage his ideas of Aryan supremacy by winning four gold medals.

## THE FIRST EVENTS





**1928**

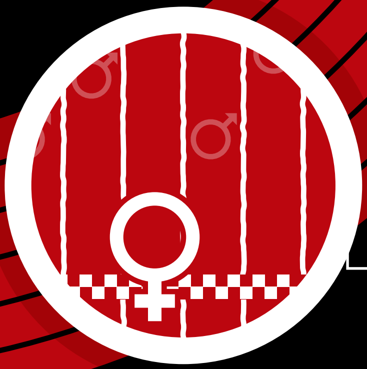
**Light a fire**

The Olympic flame is introduced for the first time. The torch relay, however, will not take place until 1936.

**1896**

**Athens plays host**

The first Games organised by the IOC are held in Athens. 14 nations compete in 43 events, while the largest crowd ever to attend a sporting event watches on.



**1900**

**Olympic equality**

Women are allowed to compete for the first time during the 1900 Summer Olympics held in Paris. Sailor Helene de Pourtales becomes the first female Olympian.

© Alamy, Getty Images, Rex Features, Marcus Faint

## DISPLAY OF STRENGTH

TITLED THE 'RALLY OF HONOUR', THE NUREMBERG RALLY OF 1936 WITNESSED A SIGNIFICANT SHOW OF MILITARY MIGHT BY THE NAZI GOVERNMENT DURING AN EVENT THAT CELEBRATED THE REMILITARISATION OF THE RHINELAND.

# THE ANSCHLUSS

How the Nazis were allowed to get round Versailles in their biggest step yet towards dominance in Europe

Both during and after his rise to power, Adolf Hitler sought the realisation of one of his first goals: to absorb into Germany all of the territories that spoke the mother tongue. One of his primary targets to this end was neighbouring Austria.

Before the Nazis took control, such a target wouldn't likely have been possible. In the wake of Germany's defeat in World War I harsh sanctions were imposed with the express purpose of preventing the country from becoming a military power once more. In addition to crippling war reparations, the 1919 Treaty of Versailles and the Treaty of Saint-Germain forbid the union of Germany with Austria.

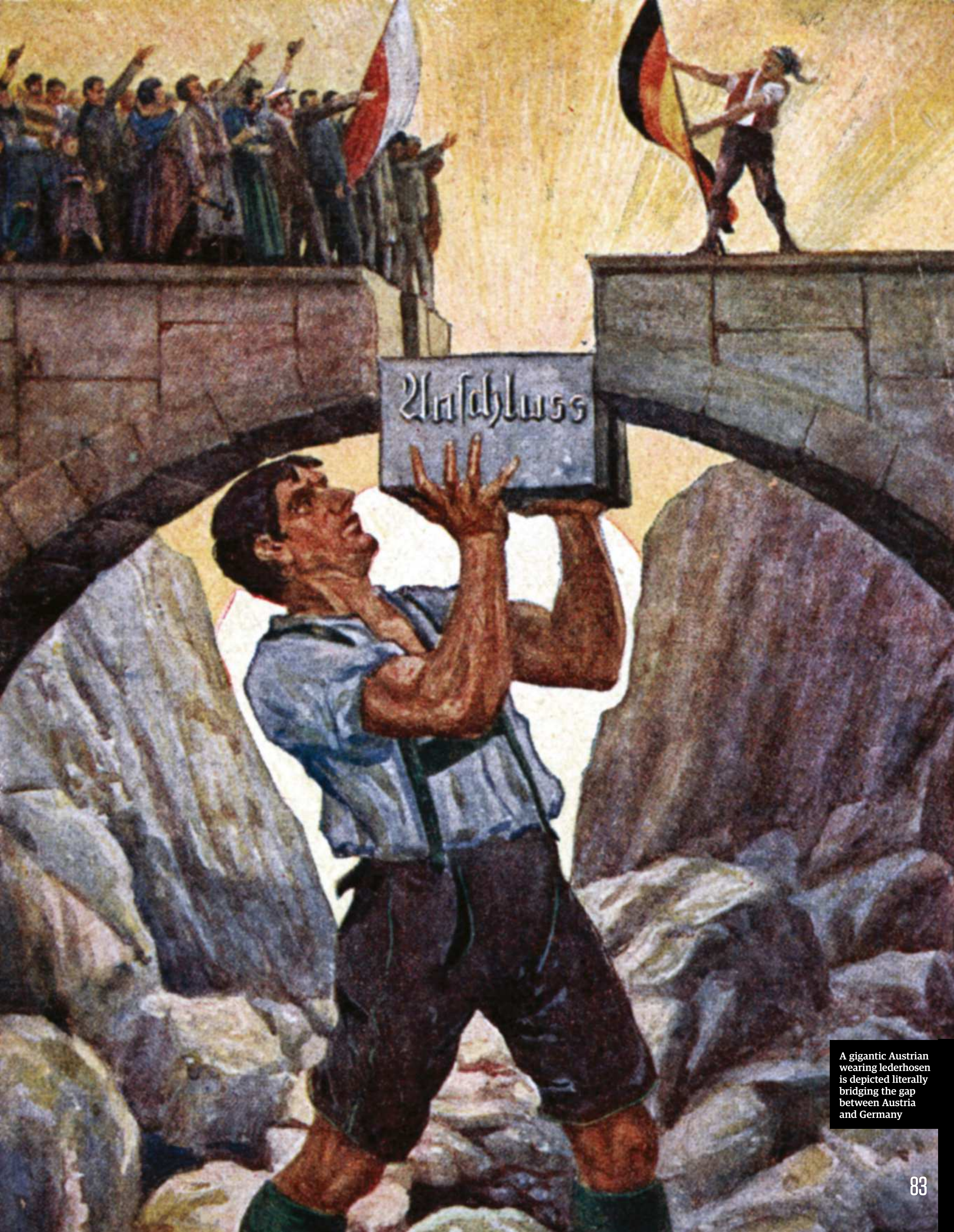
Ironically, it was the ferocity of the treaties' terms that played a large part in their undoing. During the Nazi Party's formative years Hitler played up to the resentment felt by large parts of the populace at what they saw as the unnecessarily punitive nature of the treaties. It was this manipulation of public feeling that helped the Nazis to take power in January 1933.

Having already tested the waters of the League of Nations' tolerance with a stringent programme of military rearmament and the 1936 reoccupation of the Rhineland region (demilitarised post-Versailles), Hitler next set his sights on Anschluss: making Austria a part of Germany. He had been open in *Mein Kampf* about his desire to bring back the estimated 10 million ethnic Germans in central and eastern Europe into his sphere of influence (the Volksdeutsche: 'Germans in regard to people or race'), many of which had been separated from Germany due to the machinations of Versailles. Moreover, Anschluss was an early example of Hitler's obsession with Lebensraum ('living space'), which he believed Germany needed if it was to have any hope of survival.

Even so, he didn't initially seek to seize the country by military force. Instead, the process of agitating Austria towards Anschluss was a more gradual one. Despite being some way off gaining power, the Austrian Nazi Party had already made strong electoral gains, garnering over 16 per cent of the vote in Vienna, Lower Austria and Salzburg, among other places, on 24 April 1932. A year later, it got 41 per cent of the vote in Innsbruck. Its influence was on the rise.

Further advances in power were arrested by the intervention of Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss, however, who on 4 March 1933 suspended the country's parliament, partly in response to Hitler's rise to power and the growing threat of the Nazi Party to Austria. His own Christian Social Party assumed control, with all other parties (including the Nazis) banned apart from the Social Democratic Labour Party, who themselves were later made illegal following the events of the 16-day Austrian Civil War.

**"HITLER HAD BEEN OPEN IN MEIN KAMPF ABOUT HIS DESIRE TO BRING THE ETHNIC GERMANS OF EUROPE UNDER HIS INFLUENCE"**



A gigantic Austrian wearing lederhosen is depicted literally bridging the gap between Austria and Germany

The Nazis' response was both internal and external: the Austrian Nazi Party undertook a series of bombings against government personnel, while on 26 May Hitler impressed a 1,000-Reichsmark tariff on German citizens travelling into Austria. Although the Austrian Nazis were unable to seize power, they did succeed in murdering Dollfuss following an attack on his Vienna office on 25 July 1934, shooting him during a failed coup.

His replacement, Kurt von Schuschnigg, proved to be more susceptible to the Nazis' machinations. Lacking the political know-how of Dollfuss, his position was further weakened by growing resentment among the population and later the withdrawal of support from Mussolini's Italy, who was erring more towards allying with Hitler's Germany. Furthermore, his increasingly authoritarian government style following the assassination of Dollfuss only further served to alienate the people of Austria. Despite Hitler's promise in a 1935 speech to the Reichstag that "Germany neither intends nor wishes to interfere in the internal affairs of Austria, or to conclude an Anschluss", the economic pressure he piled on ultimately helped to persuade Schuschnigg to cave in to his demands.

On 11 July, Schuschnigg signed an agreement with German ambassador Franz von Papen, as part of which Austria approved an amnesty for all imprisoned Nazi Party members (a process Schuschnigg had continued with) as well as agreeing to act as a 'German state' and granting cabinet seats to a series of Nazi sympathisers.

Like virtually every other attempt at appeasement that was to follow, the 'July Agreement' only served to make matters worse. The Nazis continued to agitate within Austria, and Hitler, seeing Germany's lack of progress in achieving the productivity targets set out in its domestic Four-Year Plan, saw Austria as a means of achieving its targets. This culminated in a meeting with Schuschnigg at Hitler's Berchtesgaden retreat on 12 February 1938, during which Hitler forced him into accepting his terms, such as the appointment of Arthur Seyss-Inquart - another Nazi - as Minister of the Interior.

In an attempt to keep some modicum of independence, Schuschnigg scheduled

## REPRESSION AND RECRIMINATIONS

### How Anschluss impacted Austria's Jewish population

Following Anschluss the treatment of Austria's Jews would prove to be a sign of things to come for the rest of Europe.

Austria's Jewish population numbered around 200,000 prior to Austria's subsumption into Germany. Many fled in the wake of Anschluss, but a large number were left behind to suffer its consequences. Forbidden to vote in the plebiscite, their initial 'punishment' took the form of public humiliation, such as being forced to clean streets and toilets, sometimes armed only with toothbrushes or even their bare hands. Instances of Austrian Jews being harassed, robbed or assaulted became common.

Following this came their systematic removal from public life, with businesses seized and jobs lost. In May 1938 the Nuremberg Laws came into effect, which among various measures forbade Jews from marrying non-Jews or attending university. Then, on 9 November 1938, Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass) erupted with devastating effect as all but one of Vienna's 24 synagogues and 70 prayer houses were destroyed, numerous shops looted and over 6,000 people arrested and sent to concentration camps. It's thought that by the end of WWII 65,459 Austrian Jews had been murdered.

An Austrian woman weeps with joy as the Germans enter the capital of Vienna a plebiscite (referendum) on the subject of Austrian independence and lifted the ban on the Social Democrats in exchange for their support. Undeterred, Hitler denounced the planned plebiscite and on 11 March demanded that Schuschnigg hand power to the Austrian Nazis under threat of imminent invasion. Despite Schuschnigg cancelling the plebiscite and offering to resign, Hitler remained defiant, ordering Austrian President Wilhelm Miklas to appoint his choice of chancellor. Miklas refused. The next day, the 8th Army crossed the border.

In the event, the reception given to the Germans was largely a positive one. Although the Austrian Nazi Party had never been a dominant force within the country, large swathes of the population had grown disillusioned with the dictatorial nature of the government and looked positively at Germany's prosperity in contrast to their own economic woes, Austria still retaining the lingering effects of the Depression.

In his book *Hitler's Austria: Popular Sentiment in the Nazi Era, 1938-1945*, historian Evan Burr Bukey notes that German nationalism "captured broad segments of the Austrian population, not only rightist nationalists, but also liberal, democratic circles, which were traditionally devoted to the concept of German national unity, and also Social Democrats".

Furthermore, in a move that was to reflect the Nazis' later use of propaganda to achieve their goals, they circulated fake reports of street fighting and rioting caused by communists as a way to justify their actions, as well as a fake telegram purportedly from Seyss-Inquart pleading for German military aid against this supposed threat.

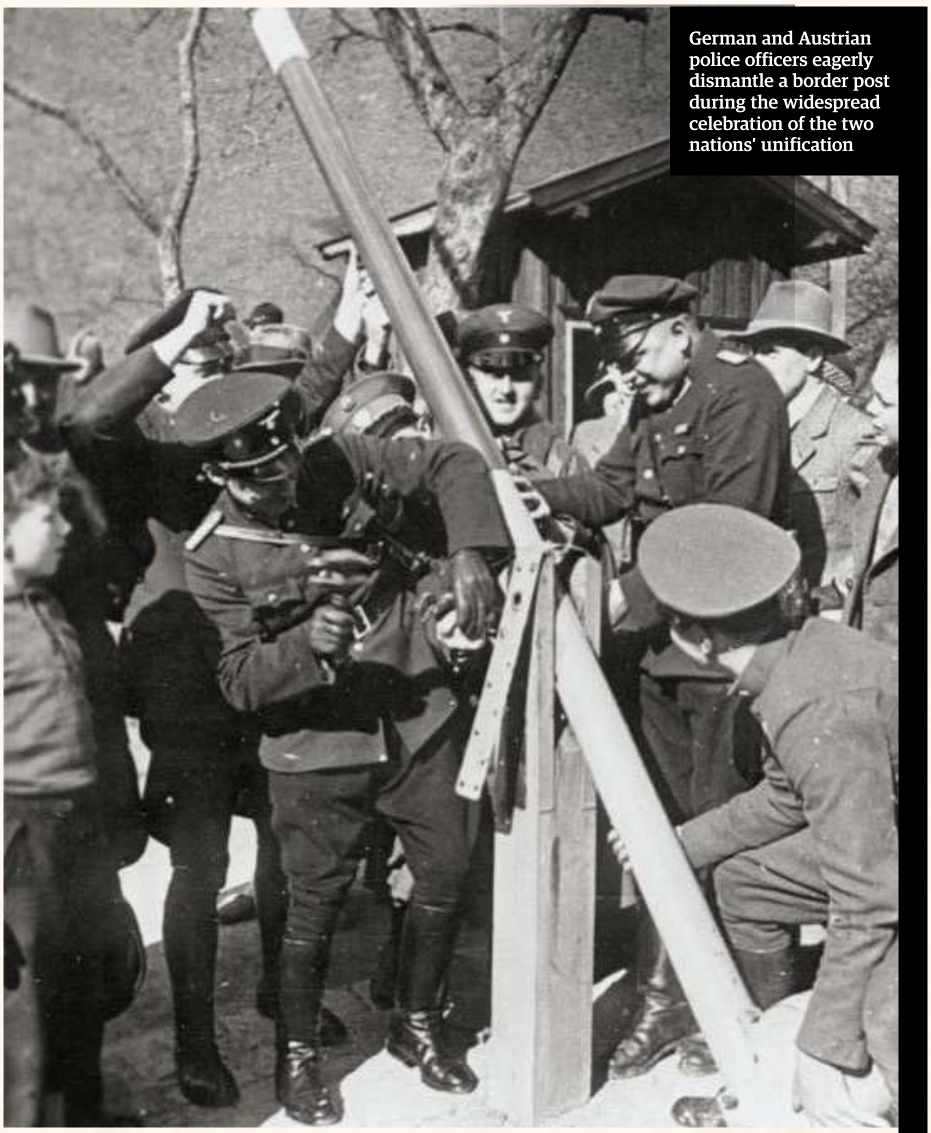
On 13 March, Seyss-Inquart announced that Article 88 of the Treaty of Saint-Germain – which forbade the unification of Germany and Austria – had been revoked, paving the way for Anschluss. Despite being responsible for upholding the terms of these treaties, the reception from countries in the League of Nations was muted. There are a number of possible reasons as to why this may have been the case: as well as suffering from the effects of poor economic conditions themselves, further fighting was an unpopular prospect, with WWI still a recent memory. British PM Neville Chamberlain underlined this in a speech in the House of Commons, saying, "The hard fact is that nothing could have arrested what has actually happened unless this country had been prepared to use force."

For Hitler this was a great propaganda victory. Emboldened by this bloodless invasion, he crossed over into Austria, stopping first at his birthplace of Braunau am Inn before heading on to Linz, the location of his school, and then stopping in Vienna, where he triumphantly announced the Anschluss. In the meantime, political opposition was suppressed with the help of Heinrich Himmler and the SS, with over 70,000 being arrested and moved into makeshift concentration camps. In the event of the plebiscite itself, which took place on 10 April, around 99.75 per cent of the votes cast came out in support of Anschluss (which had already been ratified on 13 March, subsequent to the inevitable validation granted by the plebiscite). Effectively, Austria was now part of Germany, thereby ceasing to exist as a nation.

While there were doubtless multiple instances of vote-rigging and voter repression (in addition to the rounding up of political opponents and Jews and gypsies being forbidden from voting), as mentioned previously, there was also a great deal of support for Anschluss. Bukey cites the swift nature of the takeover and the prospect of a brighter future as reasons for optimism: "...it is clear that the populace was profoundly relieved that bloodshed has been avoided... The sight of well-equipped Landsers marching through the country revived memories of wartime solidarity and evoked a sense of satisfaction that the humiliations of 1918 had at last been overcome." Germany's optimism stood in stark contrast to the rest of Europe at the time, and many found that appealing.

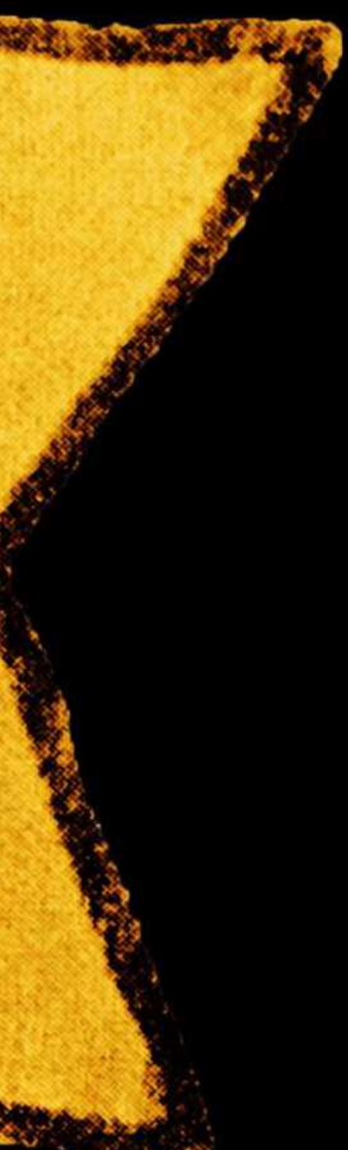
The Anschluss was a sign of things to come. Having already re-armed the Rhineland, it was a pivotal next step that would shortly be followed by the annexation of the Sudetenland. With Germany's military strength growing, soon the focus of other nations would be less on justifying their occasional dalliances with expansion and more about appeasing them in the vain hope that Hitler's military ambitions would be halted. As would come to pass, however, Anschluss was just one early step towards what later became the Nazis' inexorable march towards dominion over Europe.

**"THE ANSCHLUSS WAS SOON FOLLOWED BY THE ANNEXATION OF THE SUDETENLAND"**



German and Austrian police officers eagerly dismantle a border post during the widespread celebration of the two nations' unification

Jude



# CREATING AN ARYAN STATE

## One man believed an impoverished and humiliated Germany was nevertheless home to a master race denied greatness by an enemy within its borders

His crime was high treason. His sentence was five years (absurdly light given the circumstances), though he only served eight months. Yet Adolf Hitler's time incarcerated at Landsberg Prison in 1924 was largely spent developing, honing and codifying an ideology in book form that would ultimately lead to the deaths of more than 60 million people.

Part autobiography, part political manifesto for the Nazi Party, Hitler's thoughts were dictated to, and edited by, fellow inmates Emil Maurice and Rudolf Hess. The book was originally given the far-from-snappy translated title of 'Four and a Half Years (of struggle) against Lies, Stupidity and Cowardice'. It's believed its publisher suggested the simpler *Mein Kampf*, or in English, 'My Struggle'. Within its pages, and those of its 1928 sequel, *Zweites Buch*, Hitler outlined the racial policy he believed Germany should pursue to rise again as a world power.

Holding Germany back, Hitler contended, was a worldwide Jewish conspiracy. While he blamed Germany's prevailing impoverishment on Jews, the Weimar Republic parliament, the Social Democrats and Marxists, he claimed the latter three were working for Jewish interests. In the same vein, Hitler argued World War I was not lost because the German army had been defeated in battle but because of a 'Stab in the Back' betrayal by profiteers, Social Democrats pursuing a Jewish agenda and the Jews themselves.

Suspicion and persecution of Jews had occurred across the globe throughout history. Spreading north from the Mediterranean Sea, followers of Judaism encountered torment as they tried to settle across Europe. Antisemitism - literally the hostility to speakers of Semitic languages, of which Hebrew is just one - in the form of mistrust and enmity towards Jewish people frequently occurred on religious grounds when Christian governments and countries sought scapegoats for domestic problems.

Hitler's National Socialist German Workers' Party, however, extended the antipathy towards Jews along racial lines. A lethal brew of borrowed ideas from 'social Darwinism' and the selective breeding theories of eugenics, combined with notions of racial superiority expounded first by Arthur de Gobineau, then Houston Stewart Chamberlain (an English-born German philosopher who met Hitler and admired him as Germany's potential saviour) and subsequently racial theorist Hans F K Günther, formulated the extreme nationalist ideology enacted by the Nazi movement.

The core of Nazi philosophy was the view that the Aryan race was superior to all others. The most racially pure Aryan stock was considered to be German, with other Germanic peoples such as Scandinavians, the Dutch and the English graded slightly lower. Other groupings, such as Latins, Italians and the French, were markedly inferior, though they were tolerated. Non-Aryans at the bottom of the Nazi racial scale were classed as Untermenschen, or subhuman. These included Slavic people, the Romani, black people and beneath all, the Jews.

# "UP TO 300,000 MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY DISABLED PEOPLE FELL VICTIM TO EUTHANASIA"

In order to preserve Aryan racial purity, Hitler's party first planned to rid Germany of what was considered the corrupting menace of Jews by banning them from the nation's political, cultural and economic life. With such extensive and inhibitive exclusions, the most likely outcome, it was thought, would be that they would simply leave the country. Yet Hitler foresaw in *Mein Kampf* that as the Aryan race flourished the need for Lebensraum, or living space, would increase, and territorial expansion to the east was his solution. This would involve either enslaving or driving out the Slavs already there, which, given they were classed as subhuman, was considered completely justified.

After failing to seize power following the 'Beer Hall Putsch' of 1923 – the act that landed him the high treason conviction – Hitler sought to attain it by working within the democratic system. Global events, such the Great Depression of the early 1930s, played into his hands, and voters, seeking stability amid economic chaos, chose to back Hitler's extremist party with its overtly racist agenda. By early 1933, the Nazis were the largest political party in the Reichstag parliament, though they were without an overall majority.

Germany's aging president Hindenburg had previously resisted giving Hitler the country's top post of chancellor, but he finally acquiesced, hoping he and members of the new coalition government could control the Nazi leader. It would prove a fatal error of judgement. Hitler outmanoeuvred those seeking to restrain him when he forced an Enabling Act through parliament in March 1933 after the Reichstag building had been set alight, supposedly by a communist agent. The Act granted Chancellor Hitler dictatorial power over a country rebranded as the Third Reich.

Almost immediately, government-sanctioned persecution of Jews and others began. An official boycott of Jewish-owned businesses was ordered on 1 April. The brown-shirted Sturmabteilung, or Storm Division (known as the SA), a thuggish paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party, picketed Jewish shops and professional establishments to enforce the ban. Days later, a law was passed restricting civil service employment to Aryans only. Bans on Jews (who were forced to wear a yellow star emblazoned with the word 'Jude') from other professions soon followed, meaning numerous teachers, doctors and lawyers could no longer work. Jewish culture also came under attack when 'un-German' literature and books were destroyed in mass public burnings.

Having seized power, Hitler also moved swiftly against his political opponents. Known or suspected communists were arrested, along with trade union leaders. Trade unions themselves were banned, as were all other political parties. The first concentration camp, at Dachau near Munich, was established in 1933 to receive these political prisoners, though, as the network of camps grew in subsequent years, other groups of 'undesirables' confined within them included Romani people, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexual men and, of course, Jews.

Adolf Hitler and comrades, including Rudolf Hess, during their imprisonment at Landsberg

The Nazi determination to protect the Aryan bloodline extended further, to the mentally deficient and those born with physical conditions classed, often wrongly, as genetic. The law for the 'Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases' of July 1933 required the compulsory sterilisation of those judged unsuitable for procreation. It applied to the general population, and even disadvantaged groups such as the poor and homeless could be classed as mentally deficient, along with criminals and prostitutes. While more than 400,000 people were sterilised, worse came with the Aktion T4 programme, which began in 1939. This initiated the state-sanctioned murder of both the mentally and physically disabled and patients housed in psychiatric hospitals. Up to 300,000 people fell victim to this involuntary euthanasia.

The brutal ruthlessness of Hitler's regime was first brought home to the German people, however, in the summer of 1934. The SA, millions strong under the leadership of Ernst Röhm, had been pushing to merge with the army it outnumbered and to thereby take overall control of it. Pressed to act by others in the party, Hitler ordered a purge of the SA leadership plus other potential opponents. More than 1,000 people were arrested, with reports suggesting hundreds were executed, including Röhm himself. Known as the Night of the Long Knives, which took place between 30 June and 2 July 1934, it was presented as necessary to prevent a Röhm-led coup. It strengthened the loyalty of the military leadership to Hitler but also sent shockwaves through much of the citizenry.

Dissenting voices, though, largely went unheard. The media, with all but pro-Nazi newspapers closed down, was under tight control. Chiefly orchestrated by Joseph Goebbels, party propaganda promised a bright future for Germany, while at the same time a constant anti-Jewish message was maintained. Nowhere was this more evident than in the pages of *Der Stürmer*, a weekly newspaper of vicious, vitriolic Jewish hatred. It was said to be the only newspaper Hitler devoured from cover to cover.

With the party machine ceaselessly stoking up anti-Jew sentiments, further restrictions

Thousands gather to hear Hitler in Heldenplatz in Vienna after the Anschluss of 1938

SA leader Ernst Röhm with Hitler in 1933. A year later Hitler had Röhm executed in the Night of the Long Knives purge

# THE EASTERN MASTER PLAN

### Slavic populations in countries to the east of Germany sat squarely in the eye of a Nazi storm

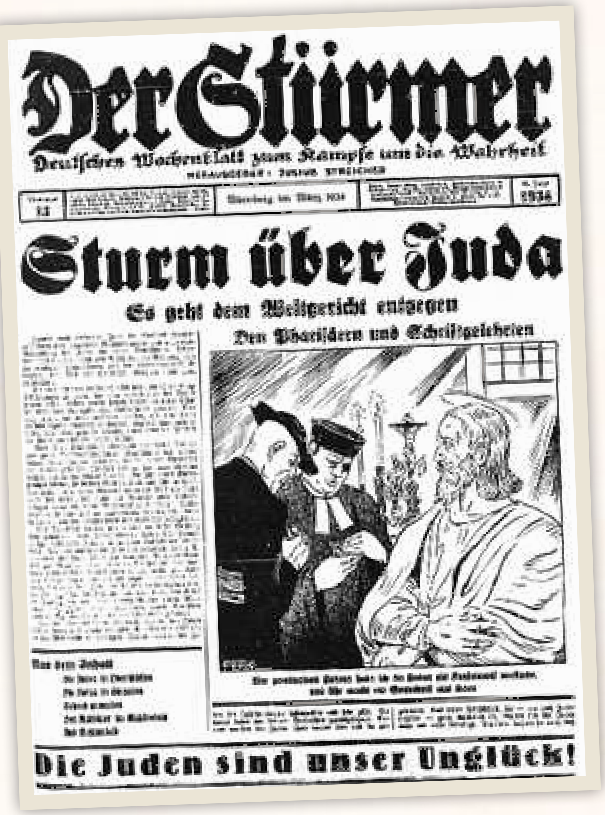
In relation to the Aryan master race, the Nazi Party's ideology unambiguously classed Slavs as Untermenschen, or subhuman. There were inconsistencies though, such as in how Slavs from different countries and regions were viewed, particularly as World War II progressed and manpower shortages developed.

In the eyes of some Nazis, what might be termed southern Slavs, such as Serbs and Croats, could be considered to have a sufficient German bloodline historically to render them suitable for 're-Germanisation'. However, Slavs from the East, such as those in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, and those in the West, for example from Poland and the First Czechoslovak Republic, were considered lesser Slavs. They were also very much in Hitler's way.

The 'drive to the East' for living space and natural resources meant driving out the existing population. Signposted in *Mein Kampf*, such ethnic cleansing was ruthlessly conceived in the Generalplan Ost, originally drafted in 1940. As countries were conquered their populations faced mass murder, enslavement for labour or forced expulsion east to Siberia and likely starvation. While a Slavic genocide of even more monumental proportions was only prevented by Nazi Germany's defeat, more than 10 million Slavs are believed to have perished in enacted operations of the Generalplan.

After invading western Poland in 1939, Germany quickly began the forced resettlement of much of the population

Crowds eagerly queue to receive free radios - on which they'll hear pro-Nazi messages - on propaganda minster Joseph Goebbels' birthday in 1938



Der Stürmer

Deutſches Wochenblatt zum Kampfe um die Wahrheit

Herausgeber: Julius Streicher

Sturm über Juda

Es geht dem Weltgericht entgegen

Den Phariſäern und Schriftgelehrten

Die Juden sind unser Unglück!

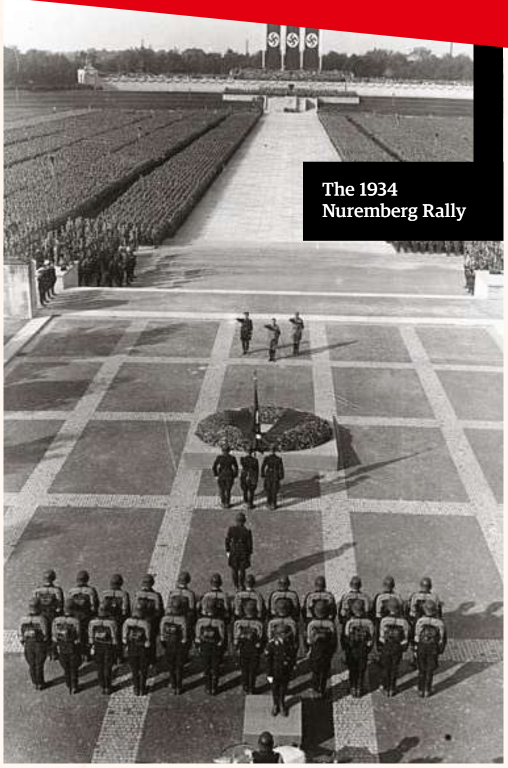
upon the Jewish community came into force in September 1935. The so-called Nuremberg Laws were formulated during one of the Nazi Party's huge rallies staged in the Bavarian city. The new legislation dealt with two areas: the protection of German blood and German honour and the right to citizenship in the Third Reich.

To protect the Aryan bloodline, marriages and sexual relations between Germans and Jews were outlawed. Germans already with Jewish spouses were encouraged to divorce them. Additionally, Jewish households were no longer allowed to employ German women below the age of 45, the rationale being that such females of child-bearing age could be seduced by 'racially inferior' suitors.

The pronouncement on citizenship restricted it to those of German or related blood. This meant Jews were no longer Reich citizens and instead became state subjects with vastly reduced civil rights.

For both pieces of legislation to operate, a notion of what made a person Jewish was required. The question was settled with the decree that a full Jew was defined as a person with three or four Jewish grandparents, regardless of whether that person adhered to the religion. Persons who did not follow Judaism or have a Jewish spouse but had two Jewish grandparents were classed as half-Jews, or First Class Mischling. A Second Class Mischling, or quarter-Jew, was someone who didn't follow Judaism but had a Jewish spouse or a single Jewish grandparent. In all cases, the fundamental shift from the past was to define someone as Jewish along racial lines and not on religious grounds. It meant that people who might have given up the Jewish faith long ago, or who had converted to become Christians - even Roman Catholic priests and nuns and Protestant ministers with Jewish ancestors - nevertheless found they were transgressors under the new laws.

Later that year, in November, a supplementary decree extended the restrictions to apply to Romani people, black people and their offspring. Overall, the Nuremberg Laws served to push those considered undesirable further towards the fringes of German society. For a period, the laws also acted as a brake on random violent attacks against Jewish people by the more radical rank-and-file members of the Nazi Party who were impatient with a perceived lack of progress in tackling 'the Jewish Question'. This served the Reich's leaders well as it allowed the summer Olympics hosted by Berlin in 1936 to pass without major anti-Jewish activity, fooling foreign visitors into thinking the country was relatively at peace with itself.

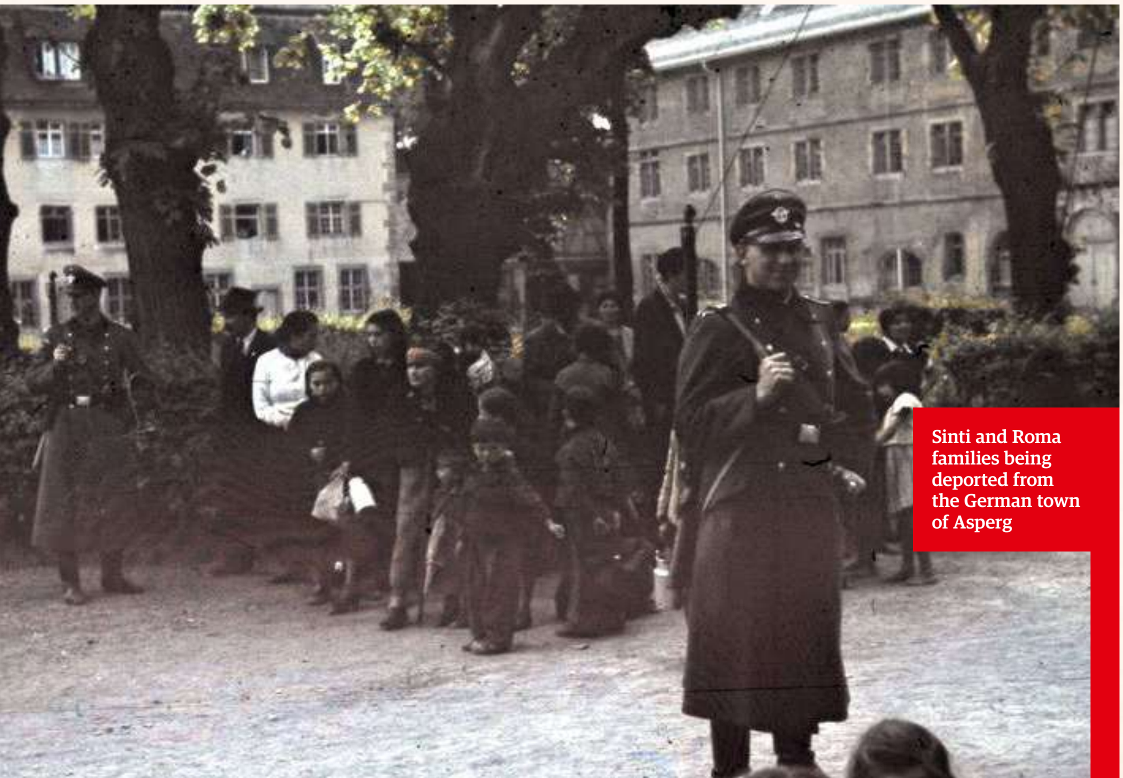

The 1934 Nuremberg Rally

The pretence did not last long. Further waves of anti-Jewish legislation became law over the following 24 months. Restrictions came into force preventing Jews from changing their family or business names. They were also banned from all manner of occupations, such as auctioneers and travelling sales merchants. Legal requirements compelled all Jewish males to adopt the second name of Israel and all Jewish females the second name of Sara, while passports of Jewish people became invalid if they were not stamped with a large red letter 'J'. It was a sustained, systematic process of identification, differentiation and isolation designed to drive Jews out of German society.

It had worked to some extent, in that during the first two years of Hitler's rule a quarter of all German Jews left the country. But as time went on emigration became harder. Those wishing to leave had to surrender almost all their possessions to the Third Reich, making them virtually destitute refugees and therefore unappealing to countries struggling to recover from the Depression themselves. Others couldn't leave; Jews who had fled persecution in Eastern Europe after World War I and who had been allowed to settle in Germany until Hitler came to power were increasingly despised and deemed unwanted foreigners without passports.

Contact between Aryans and those considered racially inferior decreased markedly. Non-Nazi-supporting Germans who dared cross the line by trading or socially associating with groups deemed undesirable risked investigation and arrest by the Gestapo. Others succumbed to the ceaseless racist propaganda and grew indifferent to what was happening. Others still were later happy to benefit from the state-sanctioned theft of businesses and property when 'Aryanisation' policies transferred ownerships from Jews to Germans. One way or another, the Nazis took the bulk of the population with them as they pursued their aims.

The process of removing Jews from everyday life in the Reich had been slow and methodical. Following the Anschluss in early 1938, however, when Austria was annexed and merged with Germany, the pace quickened. Almost overnight, a brutal persecution of Austrian Jews began. Civil rights ceased to apply while property and people were violently attacked. Outbreaks of similarly vicious racial hatred increased in Germany, erupting in November that year after the assassination of a Nazi diplomat in Paris by a German-born Polish Jewish teenager, angry at the exile of his parents from Germany. The orgy of destruction and murder, carried out by the SA and civilians, became known as Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass. The German authorities stood by while it happened, then arrested 30,000 Jews, dispatching them to concentration camps. Dealing with Nazi Germany's undesirables had moved into a deadly second phase.


Sinti and Roma families being deported from the German town of Asperg

## PERSECUTION OF ORIENTATION

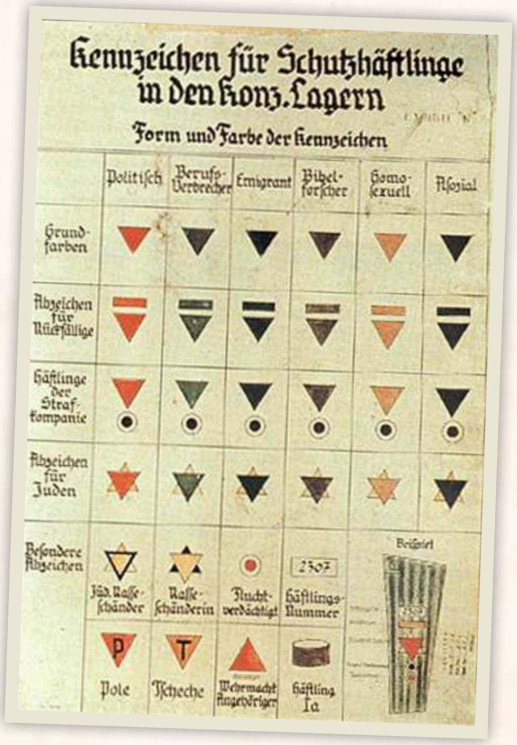
**Many groups were targeted for falling outside of the norms of the Volksgemeinschaft, or 'people's community'. One of the lesser-known were Germany's homosexual men**

Paragraph 175 of the Criminal Code in Nazi Germany declared same-sex acts illegal. It did not extend to women though, so few lesbians suffered harassment and hostility. It was a different story for homosexual men.

Before Hitler came to power, the Weimar Republic was relatively lenient with regards to homosexual behaviour. Berlin, in particular, was a liberal city with a number of established gay bars and venues. A severe clampdown occurred, however, after the Nazis took control. Homosexuality became an example of Weimar decadence to be expunged from society. It was declared deviant and 'un-German', as it led to a lack of procreation by men of good Aryan blood.

Even those in power were not above the law. The SA leader Ernst Röhm, a known homosexual, stood little chance of surviving the Night of the Long Knives, his sexual orientation used against him as a further justification for his execution. The Nazis sometimes fabricated charges of homosexuality as a means of removing men they wanted rid of.

Between 1933-45, some 100,000 men were arrested for the 'offence', around half of whom were convicted. Most served time in prisons, and an estimated 5,000-15,000 ended up in concentration camps, where they faced brutal treatment. Those who perished are now recognised as Holocaust victims.


Kennzeichen für Schutzhäftlinge in den Konz.Lagern

Form und Farbe der Kennzeichen

| | Politiſch | Berufs-Verbrecher | Emigrant | Bibelforſcher | Homoſexuell | Aſozial |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grundfarben | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ | ▼ |
| Abzeichen für Rückfällige | ▬<br>▼ | ▬<br>▼ | ▬<br>▼ | ▬<br>▼ | ▬<br>▼ | ▬<br>▼ |
| Häftlinge der Strafkompanie | ▼<br>◉ | ▼<br>◉ | ▼<br>◉ | ▼<br>◉ | ▼<br>◉ | ▼<br>◉ |
| Abzeichen für Juden | ✡ | ✡ | ✡ | ✡ | ✡ | ✡ |

| Beſondere Abzeichen | ✡ | ✡ | ● | 2307 | Beiſpiel |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Jüd. Raſſeſchänder | Raſſeſchänderin | Fluchtverdächtig | Häftlingsnummer | |
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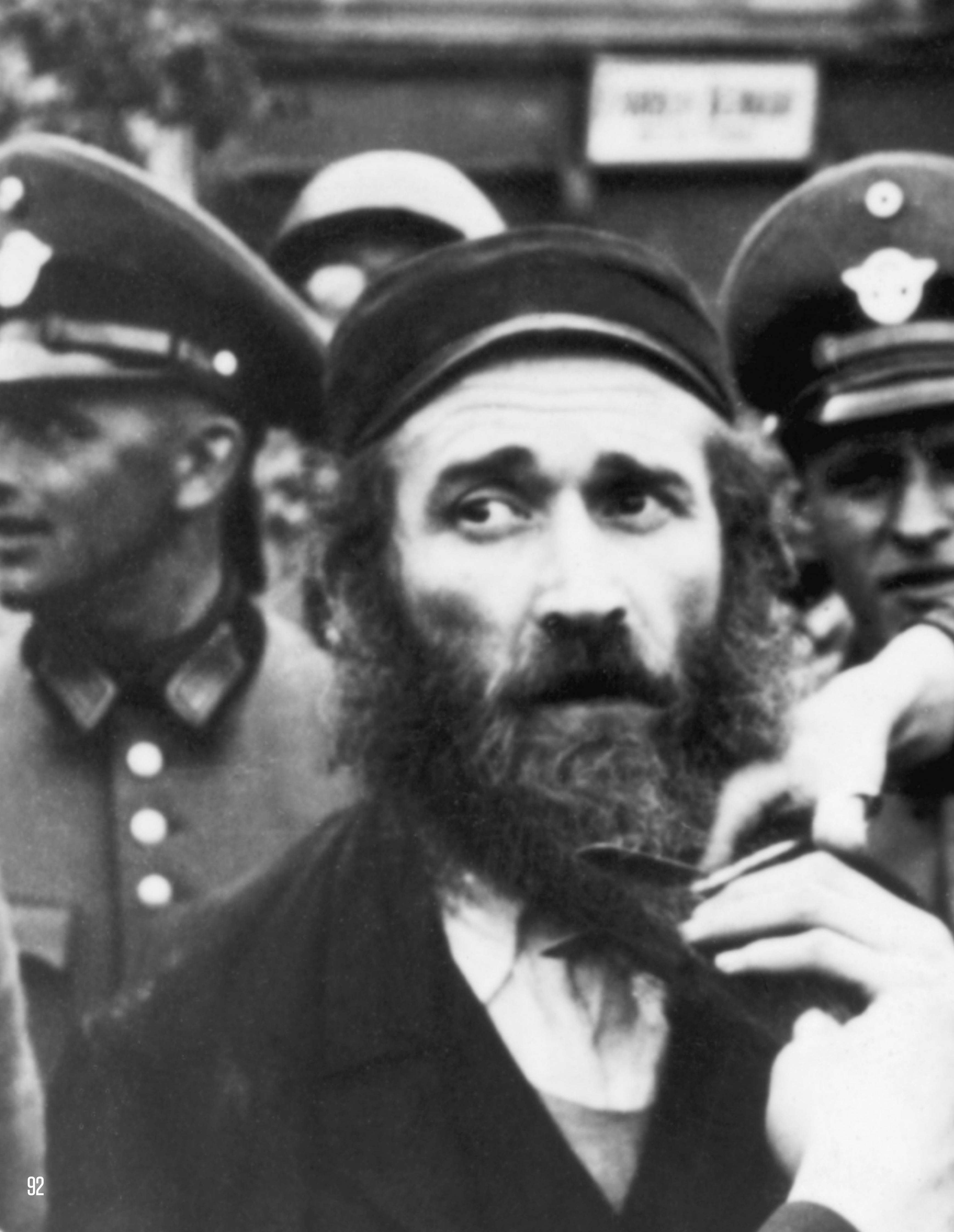
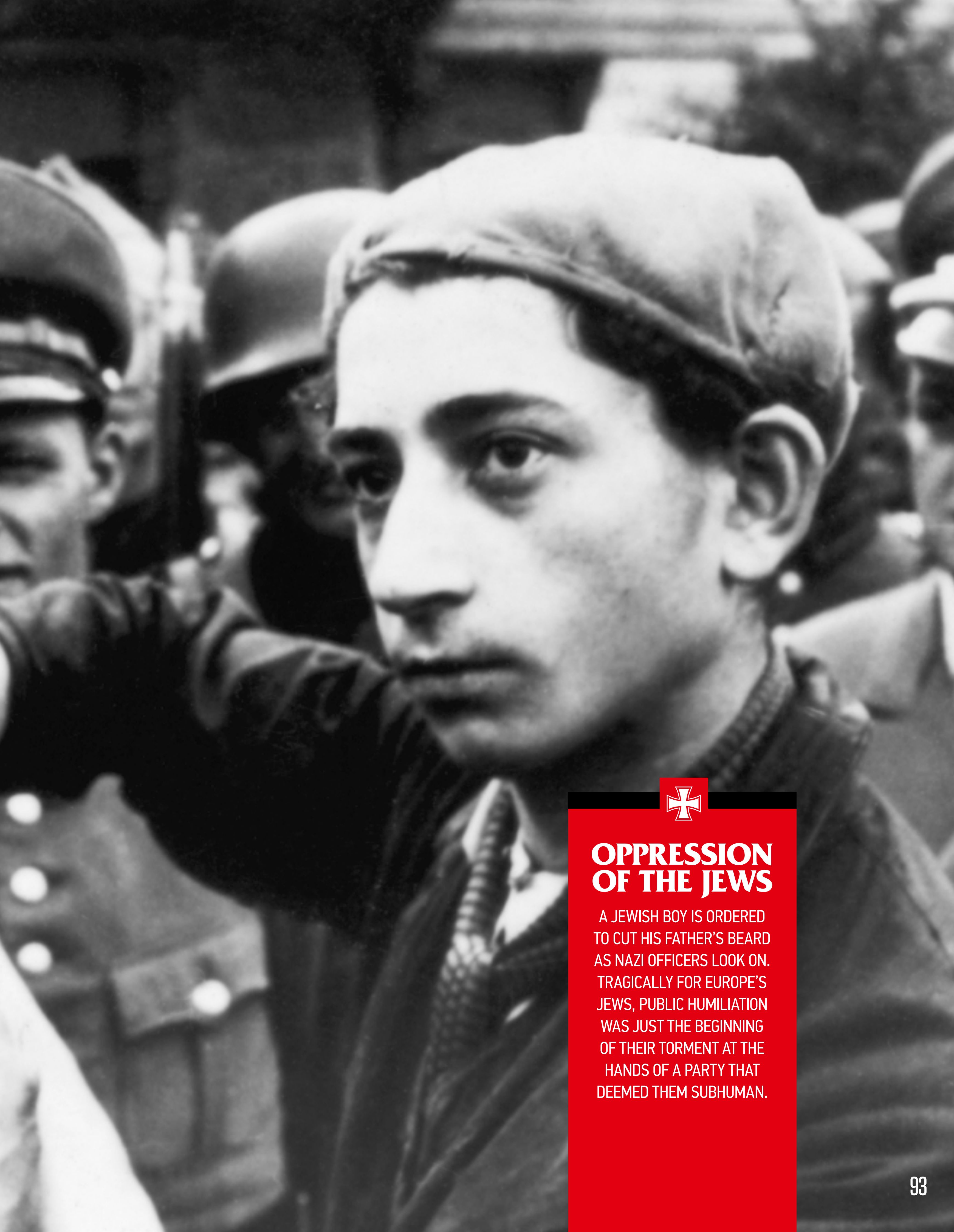
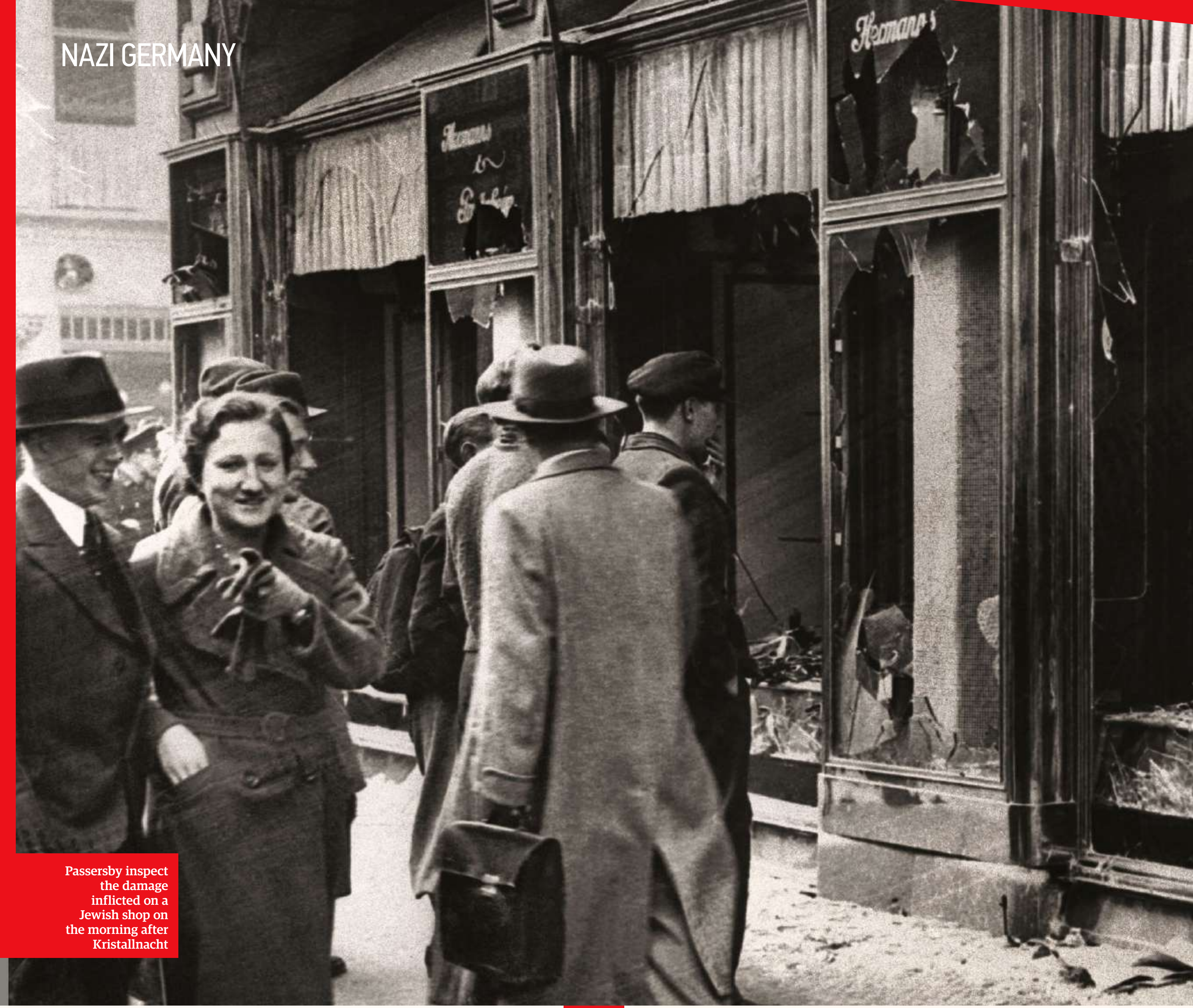




# OPPRESSION OF THE JEWS

A JEWISH BOY IS ORDERED TO CUT HIS FATHER'S BEARD AS NAZI OFFICERS LOOK ON. TRAGICALLY FOR EUROPE'S JEWS, PUBLIC HUMILIATION WAS JUST THE BEGINNING OF THEIR TORMENT AT THE HANDS OF A PARTY THAT DEEMED THEM SUBHUMAN.



Passersby inspect the damage inflicted on a Jewish shop on the morning after Kristallnacht

# THE NIGHT OF BROKEN GLASS

The violent riot that placed the Nazis on a path to mass murder

There are moments in history when a firm line is drawn in the sands of time. Dividing instances that fracture eras, tumultuous occasions when sinister beliefs boil over into action and change the course of history, irreparably splitting one period from the next. Kristallnacht was one such moment.

What was somewhat poetically and cruelly dubbed the 'Night of Broken Glass' by the Nazi regime has been remembered as the moment when anti-Semitic policies in Nazi-controlled Germany took an overtly violent turn. Over one night in November 1938 synagogues would burn, families would be deposed from their homes and nearly 100 individuals would lose their lives. It was the night that revealed to the world, and to the Jewish population, that living under Nazi rule would not just mean persecution - it would mean terror.

The events of Kristallnacht did not occur in a vacuum. Hitler had pumped his published works, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), full of anti-Jewish rhetoric from his detention cell in 1924. The "cold-blooded" and "shameless" Jews, Hitler argued, threatened the very existence of the German people. By the time he had seized power as Germany's chancellor in 1933 the venom of his words had inspired his party's thugs to leap into brazen action. Known as Stormtroopers, these fanatical followers would immediately feel buoyed by their party's electoral success and cast pockets of Germany into chaos.

A baker's apprentice, Siegbert Kindermann, who had previously been victimised by and successfully prosecuted Nazi thugs, was taken into Stormtrooper barracks and beaten to death. He would be one of 36 Jews murdered that year. Jewish Germans were also denied the newly invented 'Aryan' status, and many were swiftly forced out of their professions as a result. Some were even imprisoned inside fresh concentration camps that had sprung into existence where they were then forced to work and brutally beaten alongside homosexuals, communists and political opponents of the regime.

Hitler's Germany showed little sign of softening its anti-Jewish stance as the regime strengthened its hold on power. By 1934, around ten per cent of Jews had decided to flee to other nations in Europe, Palestine and the US - with Albert Einstein among their number. But the other 90 per cent remained; their 1,000-year history with the country, their livelihoods, their families and their friends could not be so easily abandoned. They hoped that they could instead weather the storm.

Unfortunately, their position continued to deteriorate. 1935 saw the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws, which stripped Jewish Germans of their citizenship and barred them from engaging in relations with 'true nationals'. Many of Germany's Western neighbours looked upon what was happening inside Germany with disgust. Newspapers in New York and London condemned the Nazi's actions, but this response was not universal. The Nazi's had set upon infecting their surrounding neighbours with like-minded agendas, sending representatives to act as conduits to the anti-Jewish rhetoric. As countries began to stir at the Nazi's words and turn on their own Jewish citizens, the number of places offering safe harbour to those stranded in Germany swiftly began to shrink. Neighbours including Palestine, Britain and the US, which had previously been welcoming to refugees, braced themselves against the impending influx and tightened their borders. Many Jews found themselves abandoned, and even though the clouds of misfortune were turning ever blacker above their heads, they had nowhere to turn. Around 300,000 Jews would remain trapped in Germany by Kristallnacht.

The catalyst for the event was the assassination of a German diplomat, Ernst vom Rath, in Paris on 7 November 1938 by Herschel Grynszpan. Grynszpan wasn't the first Jew to be driven to such an act against a Nazi official. Two years earlier a Jewish medical student, David Frankfurter, had shot and killed Hitler's personal representative to Switzerland, Wilhelm Gustloff. Frankfurter had sought to draw attention to the abhorrent actions against his people, but after turning himself in to police all he managed to achieve was 18 years

**Fasanenstrasse Synagogue, Berlin's largest at the time, was utterly destroyed**

Ernst vom Rath had been a loyal member of the Nazi Party even before Hitler's rise to power

## THE ASSASSINATION OF ERNST VOM RATH

### How one act of defiance precipitated a wave of violence against Germany's Jews

Ernst vom Rath was at his post as a junior German diplomat in Paris on 7 November 1938 when a severely distressed young man approached him. The boy, a Polish Jew of just 17 named Herschel Grynszpan, wasted little time before drawing his pistol and shooting at the diplomat five times. As vom Rath was rushed away for treatment, Grynszpan surrendered himself willingly into custody. The German diplomat would die two days later, on the anniversary of the Beer Hall Putsch, providing a convenient justification for Germans across the country to initiate the brutal actions of Kristallnacht. Grynszpan could not have dreamed that his actions would trigger such a violent reaction.

A postcard the young man had recently received offered a clue of his motivation for the attack. His father, Zindel Grynszpan, had recently been forcibly expelled from Germany and sent back to Poland. Along with other Polish Jews, Zindel had been denied food for days, marched roughly into a small town and forced to shelter in stables and pigsties. It was a widely held belief that his son's actions against vom Rath were retaliation for this abuse of liberty. However, vom Rath and Grynszpan were likely also lovers. The young Jew was living in Paris illegally, and through courting the diplomat he was assured that he would be granted papers to legitimise his stay. Perhaps the dual pressure of being denied these papers and learning the fate of his family was enough to force Grynszpan's hand.

The Nazi's propaganda force had aimed to subject Grynszpan to a show-trial during World War II and blame him for instigating the violence, but likely after learning of vom Rath's homosexual affair with a Jew, they decided against it. Vom Rath was maintained as a German martyr and granted a lavish state funeral, while Grynszpan would be passed into concentrations camps and fall into obscurity. He would be announced dead in 1960, but it is likely he perished in 1942.

> **"IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG FOR THE CARNAGE TO BEGIN ONCE WORD REACHED NAZI HIGH COMMAND OF VOM RATH'S DEATH"**

imprisonment and justification of fresh powers for the SS and Gestapo back in Germany.

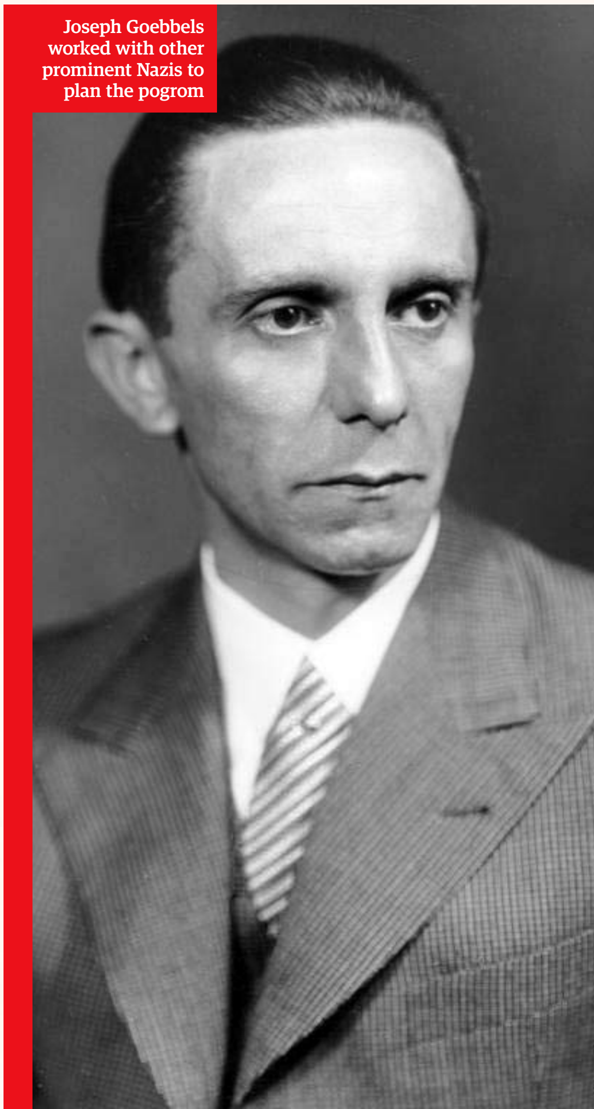
As vom Rath lay dying over the following two days in 1938, his superiors schemed to exact a terrible punishment on the 'Jewish conspiracy' that they claimed aimed to topple Germany. The British embassy in Berlin was called and warned of the impending consequences, and local police forces were put on alert throughout the Reich: there would be violence against the Jews - from the common man as well as those in uniform - and no one was to interfere.

It didn't take long for carnage to begin to unfold after word reached the Nazi high command of vom Rath's death. Trucks carrying thugs armed with truncheons arrived in their masses and began destroying Jewish property with reckless abandon. Shop windows were obliterated, raining glass onto the streets. Residents were thrown from their homes and beaten mercilessly as their possessions were tossed from windows, crashing down onto the pavements beside them. Gathered scrolls and books were used as fuel for great bonfires that raged into the night. But these blazes would pale in comparison to those of the synagogues, of which at least 191 were torched to the ground. Firefighters were prevented from acting unless the flames threatened an 'Aryan' establishment, and in these cases the Nazi thugs would simply hack the synagogue to pieces instead. Even the dead were not left undisturbed, as tombstones and graves were sullied and destroyed in the frenzy.

Some of the victims in Leipzig, so recently stripped of not just their worldly possessions but also their dignity, were subjected to further improvised torture. They were rounded up and cast into a small stream, and once there the mocking Stormtroopers encouraged onlookers to sling mud at them, spit at them and scream their hatred at them. Other townsfolk joined the Stormtroopers in the synagogues, greedily tearing the scrolls to pieces to get at the silver that adorned them. But many other non-Jewish German citizens opted to stay in their homes, peering from behind their curtains, their eyes wet with tears and alive with fright.

The light of the next day brought little reprieve for the Jewish survivors. Some were subjected to further humiliations, such as being forced to read aloud from *Mein Kampf* before witnessing their synagogue burning to the ground. Roughly one in ten were arrested and moved to concentration camps, most of them adult males. The camps, now swollen with fresh prisoners, were each expanded to accommodate their new unwilling labour force. At least 91 people would have to endure no more abuse, however, as they had been murdered during the night. The Night of Broken Glass may have been over for many - although in some places it continued to rage for several more days - but their torture was just beginning.

The Nazi Government blamed the Jewish population for inciting the riots and charged them for the damaged property. A fine of 1 billion Reichsmarks was placed at the feet of the ruined Jewish populace, with 20 per cent of property from each Jewish citizen being seized as a means of raising the 'owed' funds. To add to this insult, on 15 November Jewish children lost their right to attend school, cutting the last thread of connection the Jewish people had to their fatherland. Prior to Kristallnacht they had lost their position as citizens; during the night



Joseph Goebbels worked with other prominent Nazis to plan the pogrom

A Jewish man shovels broken glass up from the floor of a bedding company

they had lost their property and any semblance of receiving protection from their fellow citizenry; and in the immediate aftermath they had lost the opportunity to re-build and work towards a future. By December that year Jews were banned from most places in the country.

Britain would accept 10,000 more refugees in the coming weeks - this time only children - but denied continued migration into Palestine. Some within Germany's borders, however, selflessly compromised their privileged positions to speak out against the actions of Kristallnacht, bravely acting as champions for those who had been deprived a voice. A Christian pastor was one of their number, but after publicly denouncing the actions of the Nazi thuggery he was torn from his bible class, beaten, thrown onto a shed roof and later imprisoned. His vicarage, in an echo of the fate of the synagogues, was destroyed.

Kristallnacht was a tipping point in the history of the 20th century. It was the moment when Nazi Germany stepped over the event horizon and into a black hole of brutal discrimination and persecution. There would be no going back; from bitter words and small-scale malicious acts had grown horrific humiliations, mutilations and mass murders that would leave a heinous smear on human history.

Kristallnacht cemented the Germans under Nazi rule as a barbaric and inhumane people in the views of the Western powers, but few could have seen the event for what it truly was: an ominous foreshadowing of the Holocaust. The stage for unrelenting mass genocide had been set, and the killing was only just beginning.

# FALL OF THE REICH

**100** **INVASION OF EUROPE**
With Germany having been primed for war for years, Hitler finally initiated the conflict he had always wanted by invading Poland, the first of many nations the formidable Wehrmacht would overrun

**104** **GERMANY'S HOME FRONT**
As war raged across Europe, Germany held its breath and hoped for victory. From triumphant beginnings to the shadow of defeat, discover what life was really like in Germany under the Nazis' rule

**112** **THE END OF THE THIRD REICH**
Relive the ferocious Battle of Berlin, a merciless contest that saw the German capital littered with corpses and forced Hitler and his henchmen to accept the reality of defeat

**124** **WHAT IF... THE NAZIS NEVER GAINED POWER?**
What would life in Germany have been like if Hitler and the Nazis had never taken control of a weakened nation in search of salvation?

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Der Feind si
Verdu

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ieht Dein Licht!
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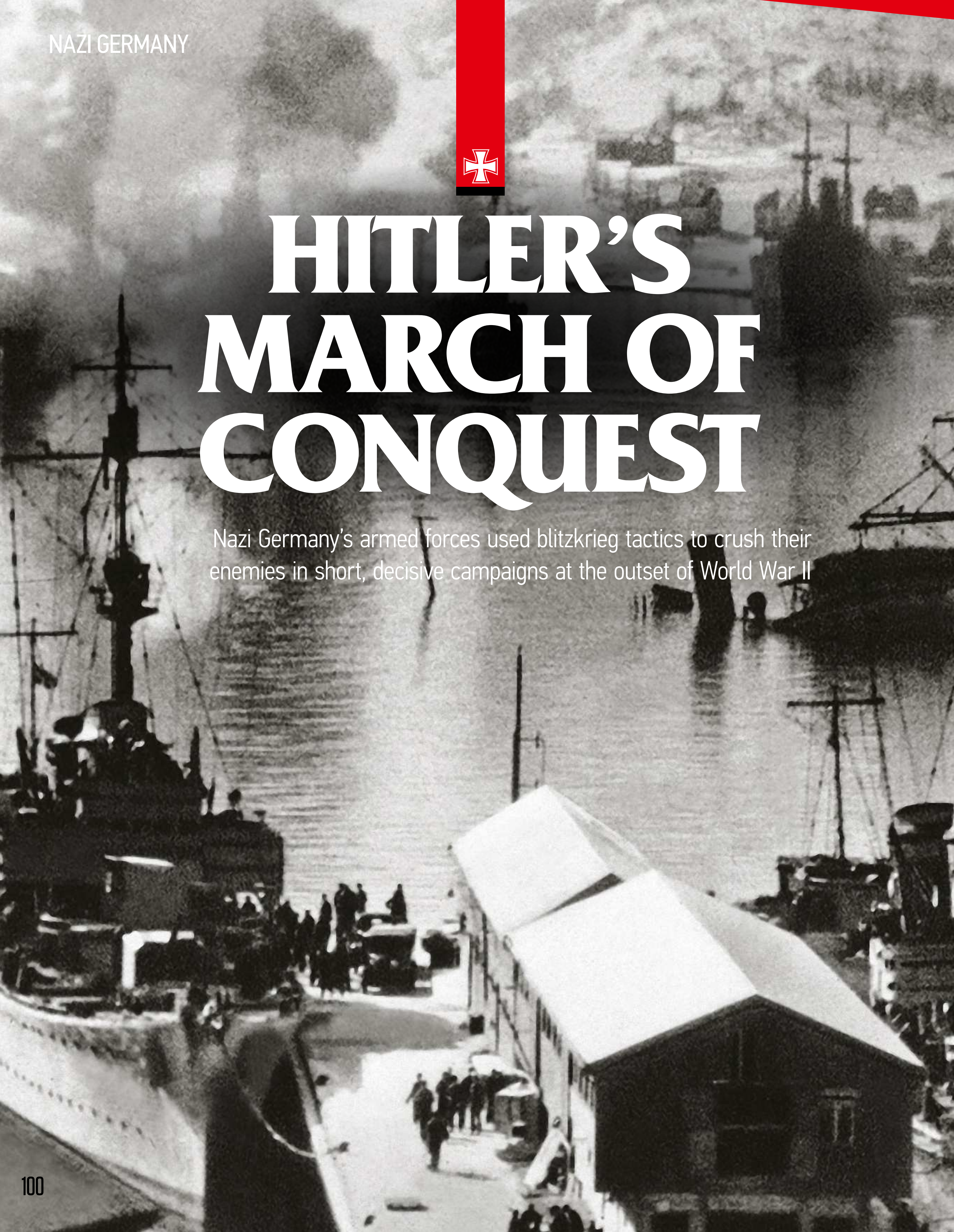


# HITLER'S MARCH OF CONQUEST

Nazi Germany's armed forces used blitzkrieg tactics to crush their enemies in short, decisive campaigns at the outset of World War II

The contrast between the army of Nazi Germany and that of the Second Polish Republic on the eve of the German invasion of Poland could not have been starker. As it prepared to invade Poland, the German Wehrmacht deployed armoured columns supported by professional infantry and powerful artillery units on the Polish frontier. As for the Poles, they fielded infantry, cavalry and artillery units reminiscent of World War I.

The Germans crossed the Polish border on 1 September 1939, thereby starting WWII. The Poles had positioned one-third of their troops on the frontier, and most of these troops soon found themselves surrounded in pockets from which they had to try to fight their way out.

By 8 September the lead elements of the German 10th Army had reached the outskirts of Warsaw. German artillery and aircraft began to pound the Polish capital into submission.

The Poles were in for another shock. On 17 September the Red Army invaded eastern Poland as part of the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact by which Germany and the Soviet Union divided up the country. The Poles promptly surrendered on 6 October. Hitler had his first victory of the war.

## INVASION OF NORWAY

Hitler's fear that Britain would occupy Norway compelled him to invade Denmark and Norway on 9 April 1940. Nazi Germany sought to control Norway to ensure the safe transit by sea of Swedish iron ore for its wartime economy and to build U-boat bases on its west coast.

Hitler believed it was essential to occupy Denmark so that the Luftwaffe could use Danish airfields to supply and support German units in Norway. The Danes surrendered on the morning of the attack.

Meanwhile, a large flotilla of German warships steamed north to Norway accompanying troop transports bearing 10,000 men. Troops were put ashore to capture Bergen, Narvik, Oslo, Tromsø, Stavanger and Trondheim.

A crucial advantage the German forces had over the Allied troops that landed to assist the Norwegians was complete control of the skies. In the decisive Second Battle of Narvik on 13 April, a large British flotilla consisting of the battleship HMS Warspite and nine destroyers sunk all of the German vessels in the harbour. Subsequently, Allied ground forces seized Narvik on 27 May, but these forces were withdrawn on 7- 8 June. Norway gave up the fight soon after on 10 June.

## WAR IN THE WEST

The Allies felt a deep sense of foreboding as 2.5 million German troops massed on the borders of the Low Countries and France following the fall of Poland. Fearing Hitler's wrath, Holland remained steadfastly neutral. However, the Belgian army mobilised in August 1939.

The French believed that the Maginot Line, a string of fortifications from Switzerland to the Belgian border, would stop cold any German attack. But since the Maginot Line ended at the Belgian border, its northern flank could be turned by an attack through the hilly Ardennes region of Luxembourg and southern Belgium, an area deemed impenetrable by the French.

The German strategy called for a strong feint into the Low Countries to pin down Allied forces in Belgium while the main blow was to be made by armoured spearheads that would sweep through the Ardennes and into France.

Generaloberst Gerd von Rundstedt's Army Group A was entrusted with operations against Holland and Belgium, while Generaloberst Fedor von Bock's Army Group B, which had seven German panzer divisions, would advance through the Ardennes region, thereby skirting the Maginot Line.

## RETREAT TO FLANDERS

The Germans attacked Belgium, Holland and France simultaneously on 10 May. The Luftwaffe committed 4,000 airborne troops and 12,000 light infantry to the invasion of Holland, where they were to seize bridges, airfields and canal locks. The Dutch army defended the airfields well with their machine guns, cutting down droves of lightly armed German paratroopers and glider troops.

While negotiations were underway for the Dutch surrender on 14 May, a flight of 54 German medium bombers unloaded 90 tons of ordnance onto Rotterdam. The 'Rotterdam Blitz' shocked the West and stunned the Dutch into submission the following day.

The Belgian army joined with French and British soldiers in an effort to check the German advance by taking up defensive positions behind the Dyle River. French and British armoured and motorised

> **"THE MAIN BLOW WAS TO BE MADE BY SPEARHEADS SWEEPING THROUGH THE ARDENNES REGION AND DOWN INTO FRANCE"**

Professional soldiers, modern equipment and combined arms were fundamental factors in the success of the German blitzkrieg attacks

divisions raced north to reinforce the Belgians, thereby playing directly into German hands. The Germans' rapid advance through the Ardennes turned the right flank of the Dyle Line. The Allied forces in Belgium had no choice but to withdraw in late May to West Flanders, where they made a last-ditch stand. It proved ineffective and too little too late for Belgium, which followed its Dutch neighbour and duly surrendered on 28 May.

## RACE TO THE CHANNEL

Rundstedt's hard-charging panzers reached the Meuse River via the Ardennes in just three days. After smashing their way through the weak French forces defending the Meuse Line, the German panzer spearheads raced towards the English Channel. General Heinz Guderian's XIX P Corps reached the stretch of water separating Britain and the continent on 20 May. By reaching the Channel, the Germans succeeded in bottling up the French 1st Army and the British Expeditionary Force in a large pocket in Flanders.

The British subsequently, and somewhat incredibly, managed to evacuate approximately 300,000 British and French troops from Dunkirk as Marshal Philippe Pétain prepared to sign an enforced armistice on 25 June. The Germans now occupied two-thirds of France, leaving the other third to be ruled from Vichy by the turncoat Pétain.

## BALKANS CAMPAIGN

With Western Europe now on its knees, Hitler was able to turn his steely gaze towards the land he had always hungered to invade: the Soviet Union. He had planned to unleash the Wehrmacht on the USSR in May 1941, but Operation Barbarossa, the codename for the German invasion of the Soviet Union, was delayed by 45 days due to developments in the Balkans. Hitler believed it was necessary to invade Greece in order to secure his southern flank so that Allied forces located there would not attack the German Army Group South in Russia once Operation Barbarossa was under way.

Just as Germany readied itself to fall on Greece, an unexpected coup d'état in Belgrade overthrew the pro-Axis government and compelled the Nazis to invade Yugoslavia instead. On 6 April the Germans swept in from the north and the east, forcing the country's surrender in just 11 days.

Meanwhile, 56,000 British and Anzac troops had landed at Salonika on 3 April to reinforce the 70,000 Greeks holding the Metaxas Line in northeastern Greece. The Germans struck with their customary blitzkrieg three days later. The First Panzer Group advanced south from Yugoslavia, thus outflanking the Metaxas Line from the west. This resulted in a frantic Allied retreat south towards Athens with the Germans in hot pursuit.

Yet again outmanoeuvred and outfought by Germany, Britain was forced into a panicked retreat that saw the Royal Navy evacuate 43,000 British and Anzac troops from the mainland on 30 April. By 1 June Germany had all of Greece under its boot.

## OPERATION BARBAROSSA

Finally, the time had come for the biggest invasion of the war to date. Hitler would seize the living space offered by the USSR or see his armies die trying. Three massive German army groups crossed into the USSR on 22 June 1941. Hitler sent Army Group North to capture Leningrad, Army Group Centre to take Moscow and Army Group South to secure Kiev in the breadbasket of Ukraine. He hoped that Stalin's lands would fall to his veteran forces in three months.

Fatefully for the German war effort, Hitler had greatly underestimated the fortitude of Stalin, the Red Army and the Soviet people. Stalin addressed his people by imploring them to launch guerrilla attacks on the Germans. Even so, the German's blitzkrieg attack went well initially, the Wehrmacht quickly punching through the forces defending the Soviet frontier.

In the following months the Germans surrounded 300,000 Soviets in the Smolensk Pocket and twice that number in the Kiev Pocket. Yet, although the Soviets lost staggering numbers during Operation Barbarossa, the remaining forces somehow held on and fought doggedly to slow the German advance towards Moscow and Kiev. But courage couldn't prevent tragedy from descending on many cities, Leningrad among them.

The Germans began their siege of the city on 8 September. Having been aware of the looming threat, Russian civilians inside Leningrad had been set to digging thousands of miles of trenches and hundreds of miles of anti-tank ditches in a bid to keep the Wehrmacht at bay. In the meantime the Soviets relocated factories close to the battlefront to the Urals so that they could continue military production.

As the German advance continued to be met with ferocious resistance, Hitler had no choice but to eventually change course. In July of 1941 he postponed the drive on Moscow and redirected the reinforced Army Group South to ensure the capture of Kiev. The great Ukrainian city duly surrendered on 26 September. Yet further frustrations awaited the would-be conquerors, and when Operation Barbarossa finally stalled Hitler decided to shift his focus towards southern Russia. He would make it a top priority in the second year of the invasion to capture the coal plants in the Don basin and the oil fields in the Caucasus.

## OPERATION TYPHOON

The Germans made another lunge at Moscow when they launched Operation Typhoon in early October. The plan called for a pincer operation by panzer forces that would descend on Moscow from the north and south. Stalin countered the threat by rushing fresh units from the static Siberian Front to Moscow.

Although one German unit made it to within 15 miles of the city, that was as close as the Germans got to the Soviet capital. Winter struck with all its fury in mid-November. The Germans, who lacked winter gear, suffered mightily. Their equipment froze. The roads turned to mud; their panzer spearheads ground to a halt. The Red Army, bolstered by the Siberian reserves, counterattacked on 5 December and drove the Germans back. Moscow was saved.

## A DANGEROUS GAP

Hitler remained committed to continuing offensive operations in southern Russia when warm weather returned in the spring of 1942. The main objective of the summer offensive known as Case Blue was the oil fields at Baku.

When Army Group South reached the Don River in July 1942, Hitler sent half of the army racing to take the oil supply and the other half towards Stalingrad on the banks of the Volga. As the two battle groups pressed forward towards their respective objectives, a dangerous gap developed between them.

The Soviet military leadership immediately set to work drawing up plans to exploit this opportunity. What began to unfold along the frozen banks of the river in November 1942 would become a disaster of epic proportions for the Wehrmacht that would dramatically turn the tide of the war on the Eastern Front firmly in favour of the Red Army. With more than two years of fighting left, the fate of Nazi Germany had already been sealed.

## PANZER PANDEMONIUM

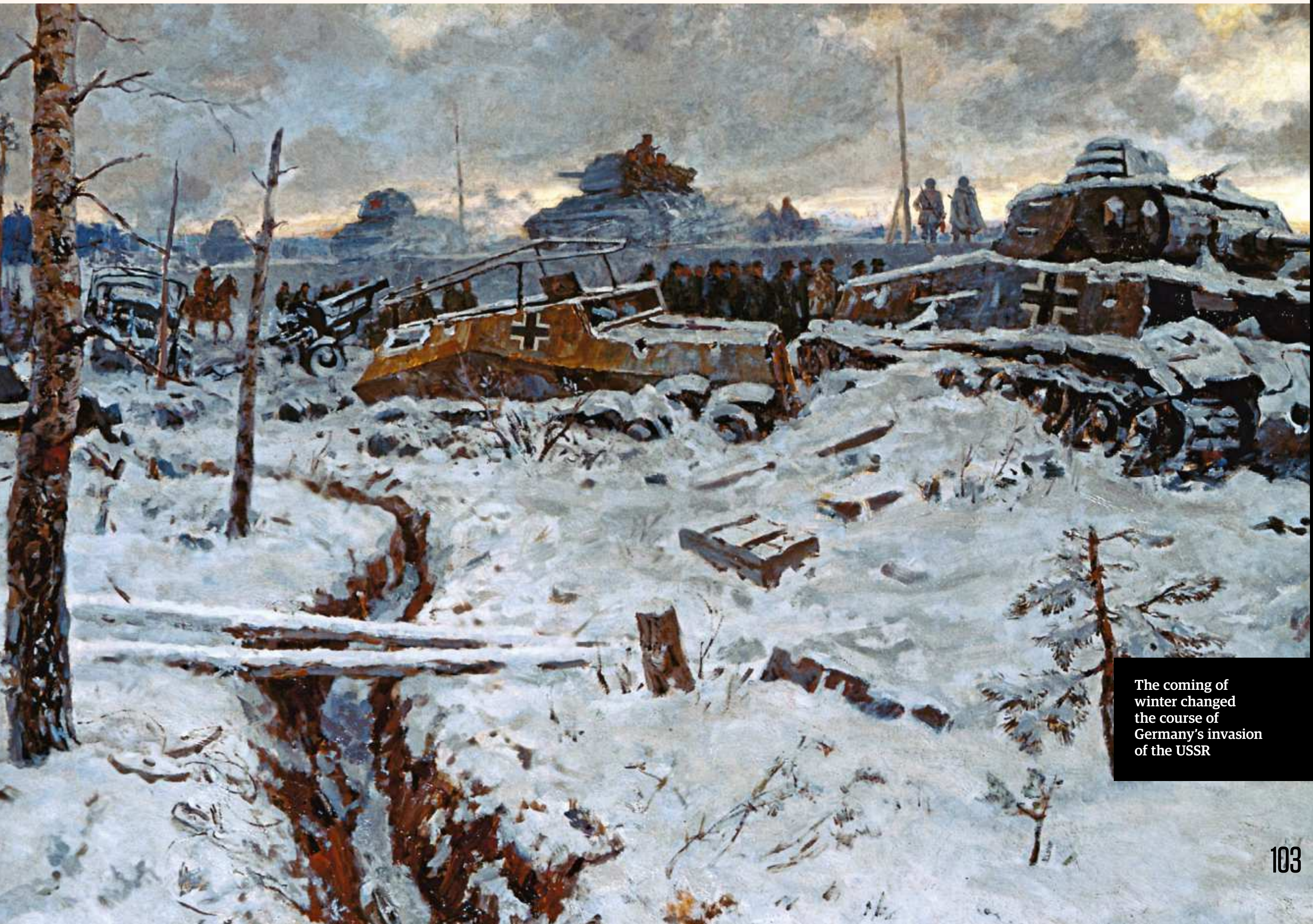
### The Germans' overreliance on mobility eventually saw them grind to a halt

The Wehrmacht established a revolutionary new military doctrine in the years leading up to World War II that was based on the concept of mobile warfare. German military theorists believed that success on the battlefield would come from the use of dense concentrations of mechanised and motorised formations supported by ground-strike aircraft. This concept became known as blitzkrieg, or lightning warfare.

The fast-moving German armoured mechanised formations targeted weak points in enemy lines and punched through them. German mechanised forces then exploited these breakthroughs in various ways – for example, by encircling isolated units or by seizing key objectives deep inside enemy territory.

Blitzkrieg tactics enabled the Germans to carry out a string of brilliantly conceived and executed invasions of neutral and Allied countries in 1940 and 1941. Yet it was not without its limitations, as Germany was doomed to eventually discover.

Oddly enough, German military theorists never used the word 'blitzkrieg' in their lexicon; it was an article in *Time Magazine* published on 25 September 1939 that coined the term. Thereafter, Germans and Allies embraced the name and it became standard usage.



The coming of winter changed the course of Germany's invasion of the USSR

# GERMANY'S HOME FRONT

Daily life in Nazi Germany during World War II was tough and, by the end, nearly unbearable

Maria Kosulski was excited. She was getting married. Inside her belly she could feel the first stirrings of new life, but nothing showed on the outside yet. Her mother was there, and her mother-in-law. On the table in front of them were flowers, a copy of *Mein Kampf* and, on the wall behind the table, a photo of Hitler himself. The mayor, who was celebrating the marriage, began the short speech before getting down to the formalities of entering Maria's name in the registry alongside that of her beloved Otto. Maria glanced to the seat beside her. The seat was empty apart from an army helmet. Otto was serving on the Eastern Front.

Ferntrauung marriages, that is, marriages by proxy, were instituted by the Germans during the Polish campaign in the earliest part of the war but became steadily more common as the war wore on. With the men serving in the Wehrmacht rarely being given home leave, these marriages served to ensure that many children, who would otherwise have been illegitimate, were recorded as being born to a married couple. The new law dispensed with the age-old requirement that the engaged couple make their vows to each other: the bride generally made her profession to the mayor or another civic official, the groom to his company commander. Many marriages were also conducted posthumously, the groom having died on active service.

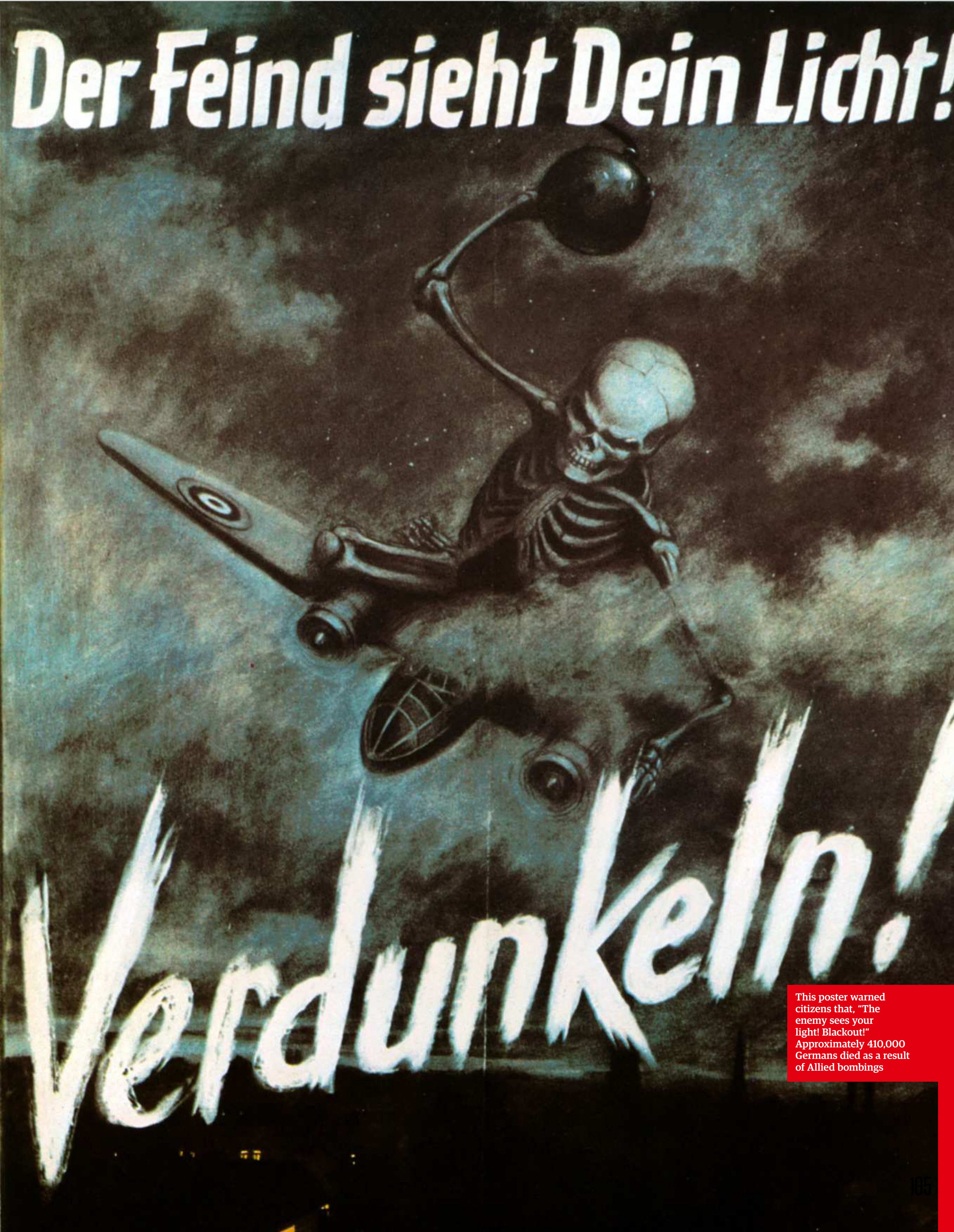
Maria eventually gave birth to a daughter, whom she named Hilde, but Otto never saw his daughter, nor even his wife following their long-distance marriage. He was killed on the Eastern Front a week after his wedding.

That such a law should have been passed so early in the war shows that the Nazi state was already turning its mind to the prosecution of total war. The civilian population had been put on rationing on 1 September 1939, although throughout the latter part of the 1930s food production and consumption had been geared towards a siege economy. When Britain declared war following the German invasion of Poland, the Royal Navy began a naval blockade that, while having little immediate effect on food supplies, did restrict German access to oil imports.

The first stage of rationing saw the supply of meat, butter, cheese, milk, jam and sugar restricted, followed by rationing on eggs and bread on 25 September. But it was not just food that was rationed. Clothing was rationed in October. To purchase an item of clothing the buyer had to produce their Reichskleiderkarte, which was valid for a year and came with 100 points. A new skirt cost 45 points, stockings four points. With such restricted means, people had to learn how to mend and patch. Nazi women's organisations put on demonstrations and ran courses on a range of topics and skills, from physiology to child welfare, with the courses on renovating furniture and tailoring old dresses into new ones being particularly popular.

For many members of the population, rationing brought back unhappy memories of the Great War. So the start of this new war was not greeted with the sort of jubilation that had heralded World War I. The German army had overrun Czechoslovakia and Austria – despite the protests of Britain and France – without any consequences, so many Germans hoped that the same would hold true when the tanks rolled into Poland. But, on Sunday. 3 September 1939, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain declared Britain to be at war with Germany.

The response of the German population was sober. All knew too well the reality of war in terms of sons and fathers and uncles leaving and never


Der Feind sieht Dein Licht!
Verdunkeln!

This poster warned citizens that, "The enemy sees your light! Blackout!" Approximately 410,000 Germans died as a result of Allied bombings

“ALL KNEW TOO WELL THE REALITY OF WAR IN TERMS OF SONS, FATHERS AND UNCLES LEAVING AND NEVER RETURNING”

Germany’s rapid conquest of France in the summer of 1940 led many at home to believe the war would soon be over returning, but World War I, fought in the trenches of France and Belgium, had largely spared Germany itself from the full horrors. In the aftermath of the swift victory over Poland it must have seemed that the Fatherland would remain untouched in this new war too.

Indeed, the conquest of Poland allowed the Nazi state to further pursue its military, economic and social policies. While the country was gearing towards total war, Nazi ideology also preferred women to remain as homemakers and mothers, producing the next generation of pure Aryan stock. So while German women did increasingly go to work, the relative number of women employed in the war effort never reached the levels seen in Britain, where women came to form the backbone of production and distribution, from agriculture through to manufacturing and the civil service. To ensure the purity of the German racial stock, the German government preferred to use forced labour from occupied countries, as well as those people the state regarded as undesirable.

While rationing meant that the first Christmas of World War II passed with poor presents and meagre fare, Goebbels and other government bigwigs ensured that they were photographed handing out toys to children: Santa Clauses in Nazi uniform. The toys all had swastikas printed on them. Among the toys and games for sale for Christmas was a Hitler Youth puppet with a right arm that could make the Nazi salute and the parlour game *Jews Out!*.

The winter of 1939/1940 was severe - the worst for a century - and with coal in short supply many Germans shivered through January and February 1940. Coal was short because much of it was being turned into a petrol substitute to fuel the Wehrmacht: the Royal Navy blockade was beginning to bite. But it wasn't just coal that was hard to come by: soap was too. The ration was a three-ounce bar of soap a month. With unwashed people confined together for warmth, the smell often became overpowering. The stench was exacerbated by shortages of toothpaste, creating a pungent miasma of body odour and bad breath.

The blackout, imposed to prevent British or American bombers navigating to illuminated German cities, produced a huge spike in road-traffic accidents. Pedestrians took to wearing white gloves or sewing phosphorous buttons to coats in an effort to ensure that drivers, whose headlights were painted over apart from slits, could see them. In the darkness crime and prostitution thrived, although the cold made for difficult working conditions for the streetwalkers.

Spring saw the swift German conquests of Denmark and Norway, although the hoped-for bounty of Norwegian fish and Danish bacon never appeared on German tables. But then, on 10 May, the Wehrmacht launched its assault on France, striking through Belgium. The Phoney War was over, and within days it was clear that this war would be nothing like its predecessor.

By 25 June France had fallen. Hitler forced the defeated French to sign surrender terms in the same old railway carriage that had witnessed the surrender of the Kaiser's Reich 22 years before. The next day Adolf Hitler entered Paris as its conqueror. For home critics of the Nazi regime, this extraordinary success was a disaster. It seemed that everything Hitler did worked. Emboldened, the Nazi state moved to stifle dissent further, cracking down on Christian churches and organisations and arresting dissenters: the Priest Barracks at Dachau concentration camp was where many of these clerics ended up. Of 2,720 clerics put in prison, 2,579 were Catholic priests.

The conquest of France, and the consequent shipping of much of its best produce to Germany, eased the rigours of rationing for the German people. With most families having men serving in the armed forces, soldiers' parcels home became among the most welcome items in the post. With only Britain remaining to stand against Germany, surely an end to the war must be in sight?

It did not work out that way. The Battle of Britain proved to be the first failure of the German armed forces, and an RAF bombing raid on Berlin itself proved to the population that the war could be brought to them in their homes, just as the German armed forces were visiting it upon their enemies. With strict rationing in force, Christmas 1941 was a miserable affair, made more so by an air raid on Berlin on 21 December that killed 53 people. It was the first taste of much worse to come.

Among the many shortages there was a chronic lack of cigarettes. The outbreak of war had brought a marked increase in tobacco consumption, but the Nazi Government was the first anti-smoking regime in history, banning smoking on trams, buses and local trains. Hitler himself, as well as being a vegetarian, was a strict non-smoker at a time when most adults did smoke.

On 22 June 1941 the war took arguably its most dramatic turn when 3 million troops rolled into the

## FIRESTORM DRESDEN

### The Allied bombing campaign reached an apocalyptic crescendo over Dresden

It was like the end of the world. Dresden had passed relatively untouched by the Allied bombing campaign through to February 1945. Its residents might have hoped that they would escape the war's horrors. But on the night of 13/14 February, 1,300 RAF bombers turned it into hell.

The city's anti-aircraft defences had been requisitioned for the Eastern Front, leaving Dresden unprotected. Then the bombs came – incendiaries that unleashed a cumulative firestorm that raged through the medieval city, razing everything in its path. Even in their air raid shelters many died, suffocated by the flames sucking all the oxygen from the underground refuges. Others simply burned. One eyewitness described seeing "fire everywhere, everywhere fire, and all the time the hot wind of the firestorm threw people back into the burning houses they were trying to escape from".

While for the residents of Dresden the raids were a horror, for others they were retribution. A British prisoner of war who was detailed to help with the relief efforts after the raid spoke of his delight at what he saw. "Walking through Dresden and seeing all the destruction gladdened my heart considerably. It was a real morale booster. The bastards had got a taste of their own medicine."

Rescue workers move through the dead bodies following the bombing of Dresden

USSR at the start of Operation Barbarossa. Early expectations of quick success slowly withered in the face of the casualties coming home, and death notices began to fill the newspapers, although the regime soon restricted the space that could be devoted to such morale-sapping advertisements. The government also outlawed the wearing of mourning black, lest the losses the army was suffering become too obvious to those back home, while a nationwide appeal was launched for winter clothing to be sent out to the troops in the USSR. This led to members of the Wehrmacht wearing some decidedly non-military winter clothing, including furs and woollen pom-pom caps.

On 11 December 1941 the war grew even wider, with Germany declaring itself at war with the United States of America. The winter was again harsh, and 1942 saw rations reduced further. Public grumbling in the face of continuing war and austerity was met by a government politeness campaign and assurances that victory in the USSR was near. However, the offices of the Auslandsbriefprüfstelle (mail censor) struggled to cope with the increasingly bleak news being sent home by soldiers engaged in the apocalyptic struggle for Stalingrad. Although the front-line soldiers knew that anything too despairing would be blacked out by the censors, with over 700 million letters being sent through the military post each month, news filtered through. For many wives in Germany, these letters were the last contact they would have with their husbands.

Even the press, for a long time primed to deliver only news of victory, began to prepare the public for what was to come, peppering reports with stirring phrases of heroic resistance and ultimate sacrifice. Armies that are winning need neither. The announcement of defeat at Stalingrad finally came on 3 February 1943.

By 1944 the war was coming home to Germany in earnest. A Swiss student by the name of Rene Schindler who was travelling through the country recorded his observations in his diary: mountains of uncollected rubbish, millions of homeless people, new addresses left chalked on the bombed-out remains of their old houses and, everywhere, rats.

Following the successful D-Day landings, and with the Soviet Union mounting a rolling series of offensives on the Eastern Front, Joseph Goebbels was made Reich Plenipotentiary for Total Warfare with the express duty to put every facet of the state into the service of the war. In the Reich's last stand there would be only bloodshed. All theatres and cultural institutions were closed, with the exception of cinemas, and artists and creatives who had previously been exempt from military service were sent to the rapidly retreating front lines. Postal deliveries were cut to one a day, phones disconnected apart from those used by the military and working hours lengthened further.

The German occupation of the USSR had been unspeakably brutal. The advancing Red Army visited vengeance upon the German people, in particular unleashing mass rape upon German women. Estimates vary, but upwards of a million women were raped, some repeatedly. One survivor reported many years later being raped twice a day for seven days, each time by more than one soldier. But for many of the Red Army this was justified vengeance for the crimes that Germany had committed in their homelands.

The German state and its economy was collapsing. In a final effort to find men to fight, Himmler raised the Volkssturm, an army of schoolchildren and pensioners armed with little more than Panzerfäuste and rifles. Those who could fled westwards, away from the Red Army and the increasingly frantic violence of the last vestiges of the Nazi regime. Hitler retreated into his bunker on 16 January 1945 and gave his final radio broadcast on 30 January. The Reich was shrinking, almost to nothing. But even to the end, many Berliners responded to the call to provide spades and clothes for what remained of the army. Others, however, began to prepare for the arrival of the enemy, stockpiling food, preparing boltholes and rehearsing alibis.

On 30 April 1945 Adolf Hitler committed suicide. His death broke the final spell. The Volkssturm abandoned their weapons and the last remnants of the thousand-year Reich collapsed. The war had killed 5.25 million Germans and wounded 4 million more. There were a million war widows and 1.5 million orphans. The country was overrun and Berlin was in ruins. It was over.

## GACKED-OUT GERMANS

### How a little white pill fuelled the German military and its civilian population

They were supposed to be Aryan supermen, but the reality of German troops often fell far short of this. To amp them up, the Wehrmacht issued amphetamine pills to troops. Pervitin came in little blue-and-red vials with a screw-on lid, and it soon found its way onto the home front.

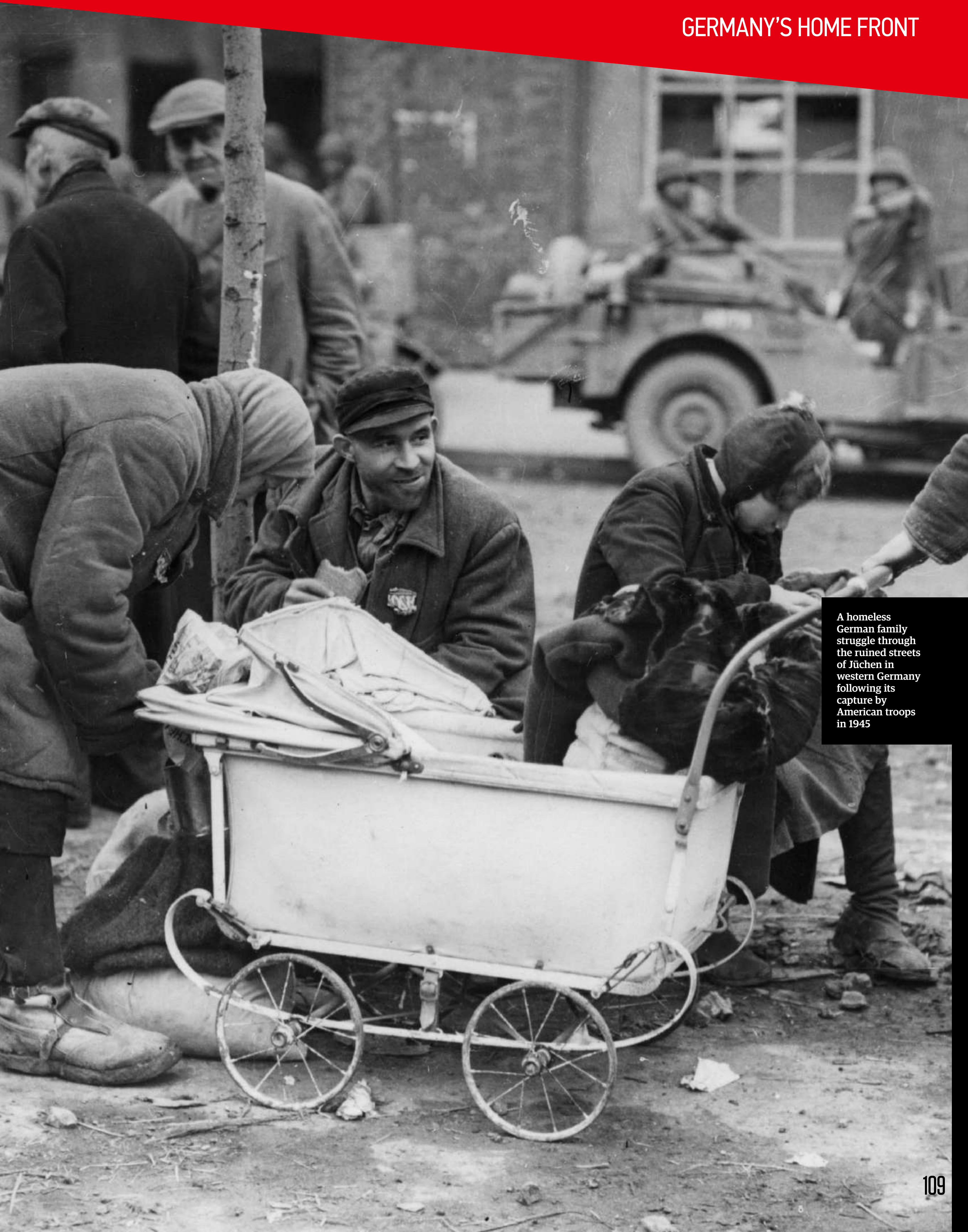
The drug, which was completely legal, had been patented by pharmaceutical company Temmler in 1937 and, being cheaper than coffee, quickly became popular. With workers being required to do 70-hour weeks, the little white pick-me-up pills seemed ideal: a way to keep going when your concentration was failing and you could barely keep your eyes open. As for the Wehrmacht, it shipped 35 million of the little tubes to troops and pilots in May 1940 alone. The tank men called it Panzerschokolade ('tank chocolate'); for the pilots they were Stuka tabletten ('Stuka pills'). But Pervitin was basically legal – indeed government-prescribed – crystal meth. The side-effects, which included psychosis and attacks on officers, were so horrendous that the Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe tried to restrict its use after 1940, to little effect.

As for the general population, the little pills, and their drug-induced euphoria, were a way of enduring the unendurable. Perhaps one reason that some Germans fought on for so long was that so many of them were amped-up to the eyeballs.

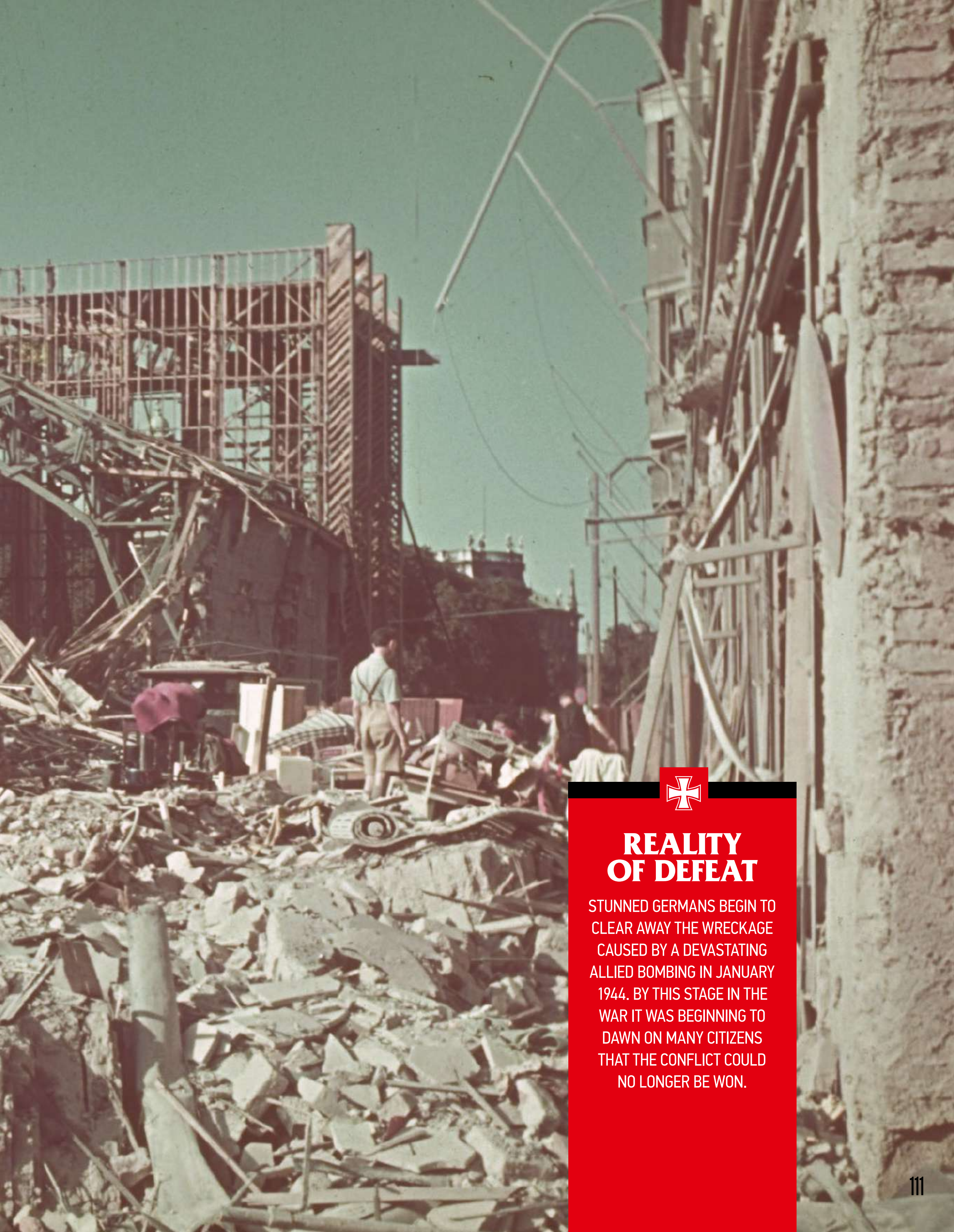
Pervitin
-2-methyl-

The little white pills that fuelled the German war effort came in cheerful blue-and-red containers

Dachau Concentration Camp was the first such camp to be opened by the Nazis

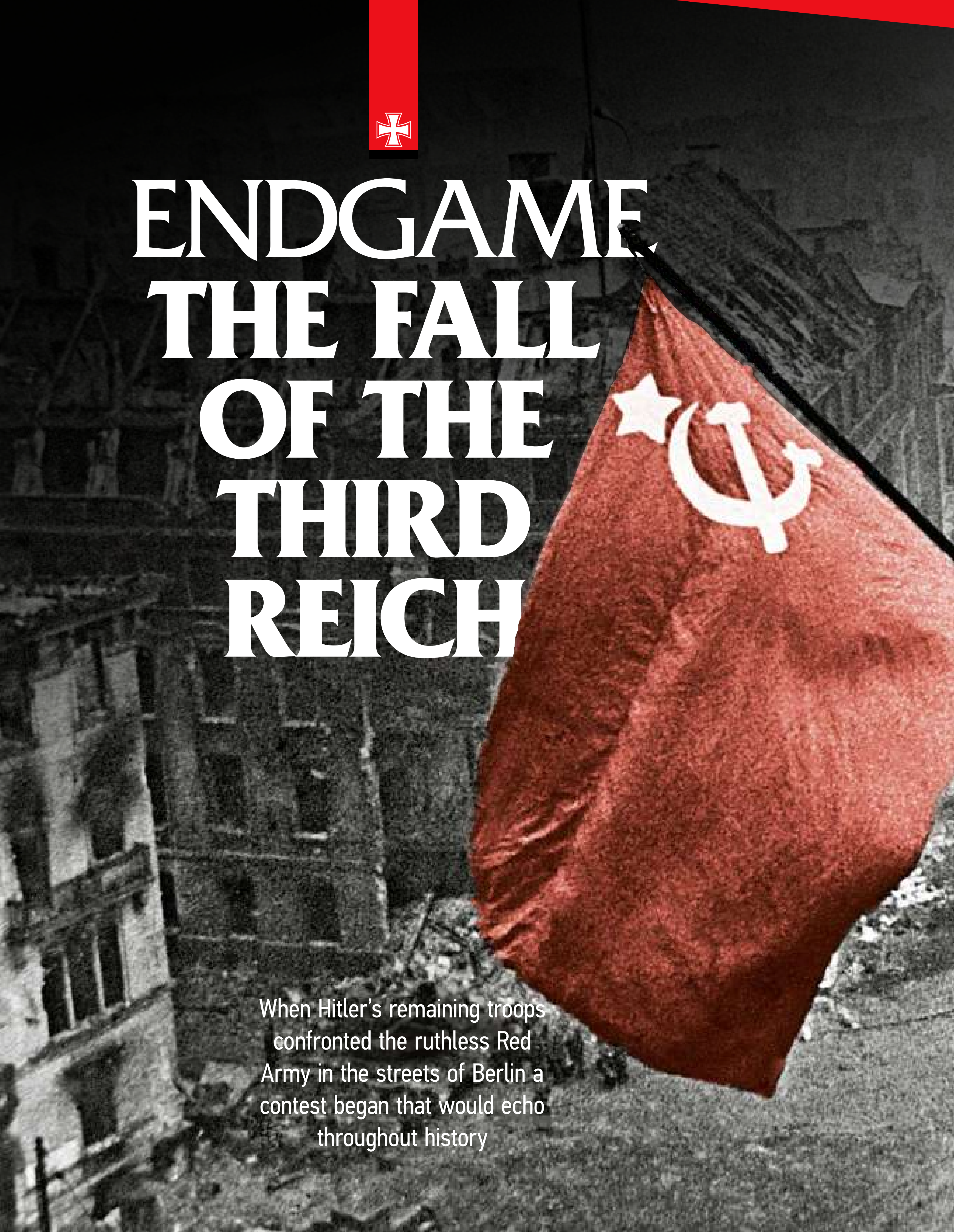


A homeless German family struggle through the ruined streets of Jüchen in western Germany following its capture by American troops in 1945



## REALITY OF DEFEAT

STUNNED GERMANS BEGIN TO CLEAR AWAY THE WRECKAGE CAUSED BY A DEVASTATING ALLIED BOMBING IN JANUARY 1944. BY THIS STAGE IN THE WAR IT WAS BEGINNING TO DAWN ON MANY CITIZENS THAT THE CONFLICT COULD NO LONGER BE WON.



# ENDGAME
# THE FALL OF THE THIRD REICH

When Hitler's remaining troops confronted the ruthless Red Army in the streets of Berlin a contest began that would echo throughout history

The battle ended with the Nazi swastika flag on the Reichstag roof being replaced by the Soviet hammer and sickle

In October 1941, four months after the Wehrmacht invaded the Soviet Union, Adolf Hitler stood before a packed auditorium at the Sportpalast in Berlin. The largest meeting hall in the city, with some 14,000 spectators, was festooned with swastika banners and further 'Nazified' by way of a dramatically lit, 20-metre-wide theatre prop in the shape of a golden eagle. It hovered over Der Führer, seemingly radiating power and purity. This was Hitler's altar and before it he delivered the following sermon.

"Today, I can say that the enemy is broken and will never rise again! Her power had been assembled against Europe, and would have been a second storm of Genghis Khan. That this danger has been averted, we owe to the bravery, endurance and sacrifice of the German soldier!" His histrionic version of events was met with fanatical applause. His enemy, though, was far from broken.

By May 1945, the 'Sieg Heils' that had echoed around that room had been replaced by the chilling war cries of Soviet infantrymen as they smashed their way into Hitler's sacred temple and onto the very stage he had preached from. 'Ura!' they screamed as they hunted down the last of his disciples holding out in the building, going about their murderous work with bayonet, grenade and rifle butt.

For the soldiers of the Red Army, that stage, more so even than the Reichstag, symbolised Nazi power. Its capture meant not just the end of the war but also the death of National Socialism - the ideology that had been responsible for the slaughter of 27 million citizens of the Soviet Union. For the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, however, the real prize was the capture of the German capital itself.

The idea that the Soviets might seize Berlin and bring an end to World War II in Europe had become a distinct possibility by the start of 1945. The success of the Red Army's January offensive had seen it smash through 500 kilometres of German-held territory in just 20 days. By 5 February, its troops began to cross the Oder River, the last great natural barrier before Berlin. Once they reached the other side, however, and stood just 60 kilometres from Hitler's capital, they stopped.

**Berlin's fate was officially decided between Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin at Yalta in February 1945. Unofficially, Churchill had other ideas**

The Soviet advance had been so rapid and the fighting so intense that the successes had left the Red Army short of ammunition and fuel. It would take more than two months of resupply and reinforcement before it was ready for its final push of the war.

The pause in slaughter gave the Nazis time to reorganise too. Reserve units were cobbled together from whatever troops were left and whichever civilians could be press-ganged into service. Wounded soldiers were ordered from their hospital beds and army clerks sent to combat units, while men as old as 60 and boys as young as 13 were drafted into the newly formed Volkssturm militias. Those who refused were executed.

In the end, the Nazi high command managed to sweep together about 760,000 troops. Many were sent to join the 9th Army at Seelow Heights, the highlands east of Berlin, to help build elaborate defences there. In the plains before them as these troops worked, the Soviets gathered together an army of 2.5 million men, more than 6,000 tanks and 40,000 artillery pieces. The clock was ticking on what would be one of the bloodiest showdowns in history. By the time Berlin fell, hundreds of thousands of people lay dead.

British prime minister Winston Churchill also wanted to capitalise on this brief pause. He saw it as an opportunity for the West to seize both the initiative and Berlin itself. By late March, the Western Allies had crossed the Rhine and were themselves just 100 kilometres from the city. "If the Russians take Berlin," Churchill warned US president Franklin D Roosevelt on 1 April, "may this not lead to grave and formidable difficulties in the future?"

Churchill, as it would transpire, was very much focused on the future and what a post-war map of Europe should look like. He urged the Americans to take the city. However, the US high command, under General Dwight D Eisenhower, wasn't keen. The mauling his troops had taken

**The final offensive against Berlin opened with a bombardment of the Seelow Heights by some 9,000 Russian guns**

# HITLER'S LAST LINE OF DEFENCE

The boy fanatics and citizen militia of Berlin's Volkssturm

## FOUNDATION

By the end of 1944 the German war machine was running on empty, its manpower almost spent. Hitler ordered all German men aged between 16 and 60 to join Volkssturm units, and with the regular army disgraced by defeat, overall command was given to Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, who announced the birth of the "People's Storm" over the radio waves on 18 October while a studio audience sang *Volk ans Gewehr!* – 'People to Arms!'

## RECRUITMENT

With most adult men already serving in the Wehrmacht, most of the 6 million-strong Volkssturm were old men – with 1.4 million physically unfit and suitable only for guard duty. Approximately 600,000 were 16- to 19-year-old members of the Hitler Youth, with some volunteers as young as ten. Even the women of the Nazi Women's League were drafted in to provide rear-echelon support. On 23 March 1945, the women were issued firearms.

Of Berlin's 41,000 defenders, 24,000 of them were Volkssturm, with 18,000 of that number part of the 'Clausewitz Levy' mobilised from essential war workers.

## TRAINING

Volkssturm recruits were rushed through a 48-hour training programme covering the use of rifles, Panzerfaust and Panzerschreck anti-tank weapons and grenades. If the situation warranted it they were also schooled in the use of pistols, sub-machine guns and landmines.

## EQUIPMENT

Units assigned to guard duty were expected to use hunting rifles or weapons taken from the enemy, but even combat units found supplies hard to come by, and some were only issued with a trench spade by way of self-defence. In Berlin, supplies were so scarce that units were issued with Italian or Danish rifles and only a couple of rounds each. Only single-shot Panzerfaust rocket launchers appeared to be in plentiful supply.

## UNIFORM

An order issued on 1 December 1944 required recruits provide their own, resulting in a mixture of paramilitary, Hitlerjugend, police and even old World War I uniforms, but many had to make do with cast-offs, captured British fatigues or simply civilian clothes. All insignia had to be removed except Volkssturm rank pips on the collar and the black Volkssturm armband on the upper left sleeve. The lack of a consistent uniform led to many facing summary execution as guerrillas by the Red Army.

## LEADERSHIP

Command roles in the Volkssturm were often held by senior members of the Hitler Youth, civilian police and non-combat paramilitary groups such as the motoring association NSKK, the flying club NSFK and the military engineering/slave labour force the Organisation Todt. The Berlin District Volkssturm was under the direct command of Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels who was also gauleiter, or head, of the regional branch of the Nazi Party.

## EFFECTIVENESS

While many Volkssturm units were as farcical as you'd expect such an ad-hoc collection of OAPs and inexperienced ideologues to be, some of them – such as the Siemensstadt Volkssturm Battalion 3/115 fighting in the eastern suburbs of the city – held out until the surrender. Desertion, though, was high, and the Red Army deliberately targeted Volkssturm-held lines, knowing that they were the weakest link in Berlin's chainmail.

The Hitlerjugend meanwhile – representing a generation that had known only National Socialism – fought with a level of zeal that terrified even battle-hardened soldaten, and one Soviet account describes a column of 400 Hitlerjugend marching down Kolonnenstrasse towards them as if they were on parade. The stupefied 5th Shock Army paused briefly before opening fire.

Hitlerjungend 'tank-hunting units' armed with Panzerfausts terrorised the Soviet advance through the Wilmersdorf District, while a counter-attack launched from the Ruhleben U-Bahn saw 1,000 German troops reinforced by 2,000 Hitlerjugend – many completely unarmed – drive back the advance of the 55 Guards Tank Brigade.

Perhaps the most infamous tribute to their tragic fanaticism was on 23 April, when Volkssturm battalions made up entirely of Hitler Youth members were ordered to hold the Pichelsdorf bridges across the Havel River for a relief army that never arrived. 5,000 boys in adult uniforms and oversized helmets fought for five days over the Havel against the Red Army advance, with 4,500 of them being killed or wounded.

# KEY PLAYERS

Thousands died as Berlin fell, many believing their cause was a noble one. These are the men they followed

### GEORGY ZHUKOV USSR 1896-1974

The key Soviet commander, having driven the Germans from Moscow, defeated them at Stalingrad and routed them at Kursk, Zhukov was known as 'the man who never lost a battle'. While he did capture Berlin, his tactics cost many casualties.

### GOTTHARD HEINRICI NAZI GERMANY 1886-1971

Considered the best defensive tactician in the Wehrmacht, Heinrici managed to delay the Soviet advance at Seelow despite overwhelming odds. A non-Nazi, he also refused to carry out Hitler's more suicidal orders.

### IVAN KONEV USSR 1897-1973

As commander of the 1st Ukrainian Front, Konev was encouraged by Stalin – who admired his ruthlessness – to 'race' Zhukov to Berlin. Attacking from the south, his forces were also the first to link up with advancing US troops.

### HELMUTH WEIDLING NAZI GERMANY 1891-1955

On 22 April, a deranged Hitler ordered Weidling's execution. The next day he appointed him commander of Berlin's defence with orders to fight to the death. On learning of his promotion, Weidling said, "I'd rather have been shot."

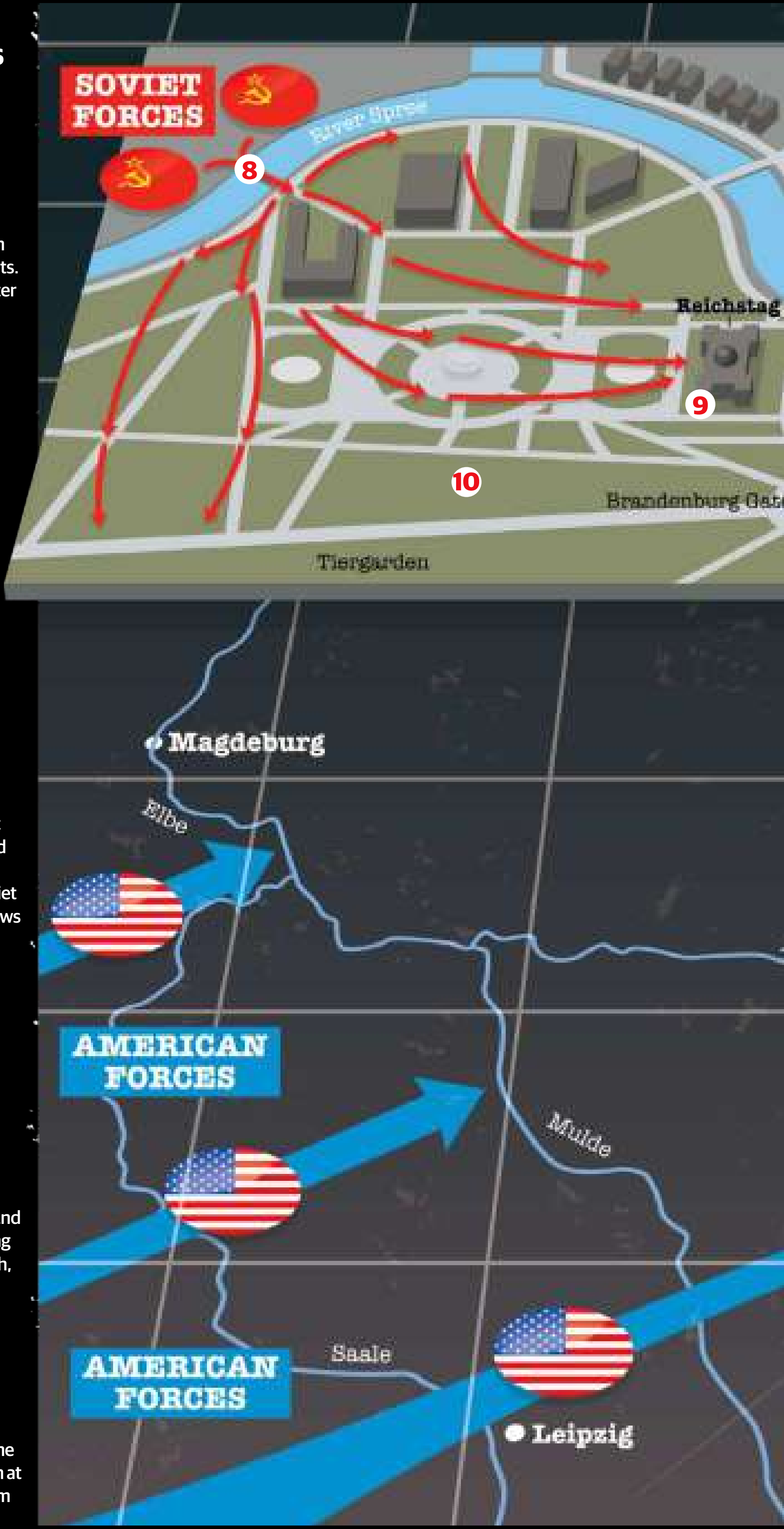
during the Battle of the Bulge that winter, when Hitler had launched his final counter-offensive in the west, had left him wary. When he asked what casualties he could expect if he attacked Berlin, one of his generals told him 100,000. It was an unthinkable figure. Had it transpired, it would have constituted a fifth of all US casualties for the entire war. Eisenhower instead deferred to Stalin, who told him that Berlin was strategically unimportant and that his efforts would be better focused on preventing the Nazis from regrouping in the south. It was advice that Eisenhower was quite happy to take.

Yet neither Stalin nor Churchill was being transparent. It had already been agreed at February's Yalta Conference that when the Nazi regime toppled, the Allies would divvy up Berlin between them. So why then did it matter to Churchill who took the city first? Similarly, if Berlin was strategically unimportant, why was Stalin so keen for the USSR to single-handedly suffer such high casualties capturing it? After all, he'd spent much of the war prior to D-Day haranguing his allies for not dying enough while Russia was being bled white. Surely now was the time for them to make up for that in this common crusade against fascism? Militarily it would have made more sense too - a ready-made pincer movement that would have saved one side from having to surround the city on its own. The answer to these questions lie in what would appear to be a giant game of chess that was being played out between Churchill and Stalin, only with real-life pawns and potentially catastrophic consequences.

At the start of April, Churchill, fixing his gaze well beyond Hitler's imminent demise, ordered the drafting of Operation Unthinkable. Documents declassified in 1998 reveal that a month before the end of hostilities in Europe, Churchill was plotting a war against the Soviet Union. In his secret plan, 47 British and US divisions were to launch a surprise attack against the Soviets on 1 July 1945. Moreover, this offensive was to be supported by ten German divisions with the intent not merely of driving the Soviets out of Eastern Europe but of actually invading the USSR itself. According to official documents, the primary aim was to seize "such vast areas of Metropolitan Russia that the war-making capacity of that country would be [rendered] impossible".

Did Stalin know what Churchill was up to? Almost certainly. By 1945, the Soviets had so successfully infiltrated British intelligence that notorious double agents like Kim Philby and Guy Burgess had been feeding the Kremlin secrets for years. It also explains Stalin's desire to flood Berlin and its surrounding area with his troops. Control Berlin, as Karl Marx once pointed out, and you control Europe. And if you're Joseph Stalin, you also put an awful lot of territory between your borders and any newly drawn battle lines.

Whatever the truth, there's little doubt that Roosevelt's sudden death from a stroke on



### 1 ZHUKOV LAUNCHES SEELOW HEIGHTS OFFENSIVE

16 APRIL, 3AM

After more than two months of intensive preparation, the 1st Belorussian Front under Marshal Zhukov attacks the well-fortified German position at Seelow Heights. The objective is taken after three days of fighting.

### 2 ZHUKOV REACHES THE OUTSKIRTS OF BERLIN

20 APRIL, 8PM

After having raced 60km from Seelow to the eastern edge of Berlin, Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front announces its arrival with an artillery barrage that continues until the city falls.

### 3 THE BATTLE OF HALBE

24 APRIL, 10AM

The 9th Army, escaping from Marshal Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front, is pinned down by SS troops after being mistaken for a Soviet column. The hold-up allows Konev to envelop them.

### 4 BERLIN ENCIRCLED

24 APRIL, 6PM

Forward elements of Marshal Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front link up with men from Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front to the west of Berlin. With Marshal Rokossovsky's 2nd Belorussian Front pushing down on it from the north, Berlin is surrounded.

### 5 SOVIET AND US TROOPS MEET

25 APRIL, 4PM

Elements of Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front make contact with men from the US 69th Infantry Division at Torgau on the Elbe, 135km southwest of Berlin.

### 6 HITLER'S BUNKER IS SHELLED

APRIL 27TH, 10AM

Soviet artillerymen on Schlesingerstrasse are ordered to fire on The Reichstag, they comply even though Berlin's so engulfed by flames they can't see it. After hitting their own troops, they switch targets to the Reich Chancellery where Hitler's bunker is located.

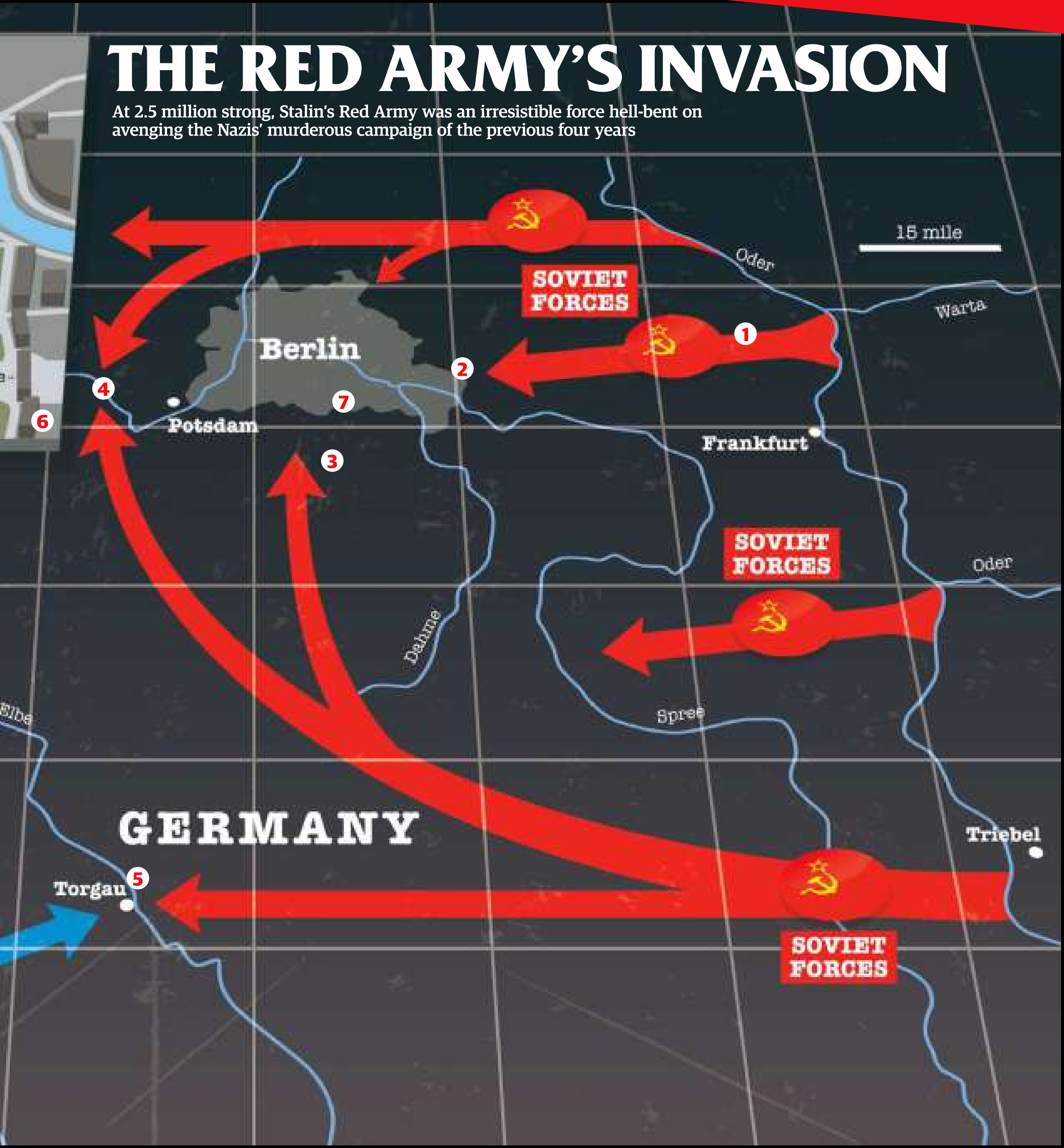
### 7 THE CAPTURE OF TEMPELHOF AIRFIELD

APRIL 28TH, 11AM

With much of Berlin's southern suburbs now in Soviet hands, Tempelhof airport is seized. With the city completely surrounded, Hitler's last exit route has been closed off. His fate is now either death or capture.

# THE RED ARMY'S INVASION

At 2.5 million strong, Stalin's Red Army was an irresistible force hell-bent on avenging the Nazis' murderous campaign of the previous four years


15 mile
Oder
Warta
SOVIET FORCES
Berlin
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SOVIET FORCES
Oder
Dahme
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Triebel
Torgau
SOVIET FORCES
1
2
3
4
5
6
7

### 8 THE CAPTURE OF THE MOLTKE BRIDGE

28 APRIL, 5PM

This last intact crossing over the River Spree is the gateway into central Berlin. About 5,000 German troops barricade it at both ends and wire it up for demolition. Soviet forces take the bridge at dusk.

### 9 THE CAPTURE OF THE REICHSTAG BUILDING

30 APRIL, 10.40PM

After two days of fighting, Soviet forces finally place their flag atop the Reichstag in time for May Day as ordered by Stalin. By 1 May, the Reichstag is in Soviet hands and news of Hitler's suicide prompts the German surrender.

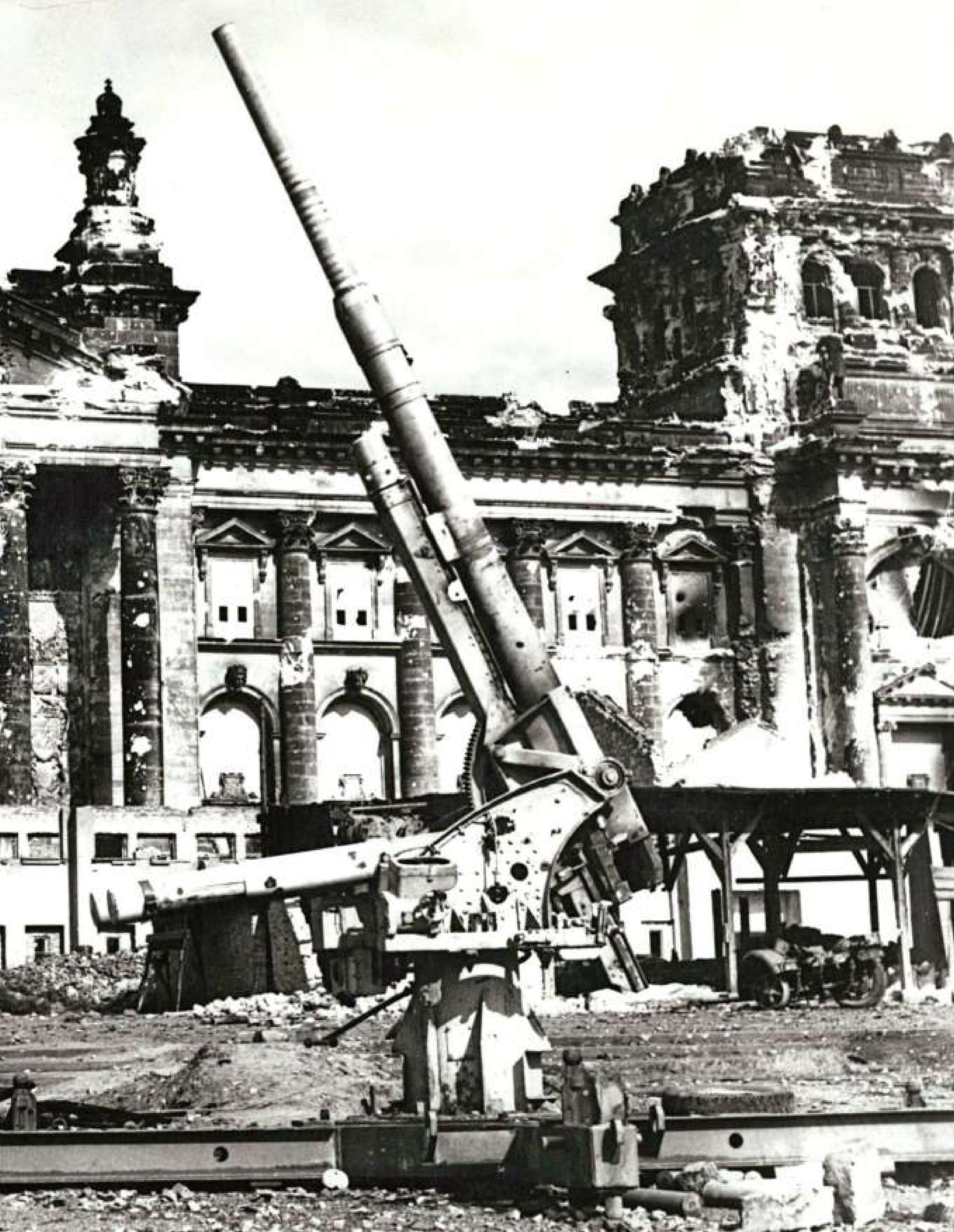
### 10 KROLL OPERA HOUSE IS CLEARED

APRIL 30TH, 11.30AM

Soviet infantrymen just 800 metres from The Reichstag are attacked from the rear by SS die-hards in the Kroll Opera House. An assault is launched and the building is eventually taken after several hours of bitter hand-to-hand fighting.

The Reichstag shortly after the ceasefire. The struggle for control of it had been a titanic fight to the death

DEM EUTSCHEN OLKE



12 April prompted Stalin to finally attack. In Roosevelt he'd had an ally he could trust. His replacement Harry S Truman offered no such assurances and, rather than wait to be stabbed in the back by those who'd soon be his enemy, Stalin acted decisively. The battle for Berlin began four days later.

In the early hours of 16 April, Soviet propaganda officers announced in German over loud speakers that the assault on Seelow was imminent. The message that drifted across no man's land was designed to terrorise the Germans waiting there into putting their hands up. But for troops in those trenches and dugouts, surrender was not an option. The SS men who held guns to their backs made sure of that.

Shortly after this, at 3am, 9,000 guns sent half a million artillery shells into the German lines. The bombardment lasted 35 minutes. When it ended, there was a chilling silence. Then the earth began to shake as 3,000 tanks rattled and clanged their way towards the German positions, among them tens of thousands of Soviet infantrymen.

The Russians expected to take Seelow Heights within hours, but its German commander General Gotthard Heinrici, had prepared well. Anticipating the bombardment, he'd pulled his troops back for its duration. Casualties had been minimal and they now raced back to their positions. Prior to the assault, he'd also ordered engineers to open a dam on the Oder River, flooding the land the Soviets now struggled to cross as anti-tank fire thundered down on them. The Soviet commander, Marshal Georgy Zhukov, had also made a critical error. Hoping to dazzle the German defenders, he'd lit his men's advance with 143 high-powered searchlights. His bombardment, however, had created an enormous wall of smoke that their beams couldn't penetrate and instead bounced back from, both blinding his own troops and silhouetting them in the glare. The Germans couldn't have hoped for better targets to aim at. By dawn the Soviet advance had stalled.

It would take Zhukov three days to dislodge Heinrici's defenders, and even then only after

As the siege went on and the street fighting became more intense, Berlin's once beautiful city streets were shattered by flames and shellfire

## COUNTDOWN TO THE END

A blow-by-blow account of how the Red Army dragged Hitler's Third Reich to the execution block and finally killed it off

### 16 APRIL 3AM

**THE BATTLE OF BERLIN BEGINS**

The Red Army begins its assault on the German army's last major defensive line at Seelow Heights, 60km east of Berlin.

### 20 APRIL 8PM

**BOMBARDMENT OF BERLIN**

It's Hitler's 56th birthday. He emerges from the Führerbunker for the last time to award medals to boy soldiers. On the same evening, the Soviet bombardment begins.

### 21 APRIL 11AM

**COUNTER-ATTACK**

Hitler orders a rag-tag force under General Steiner to repel the encircling Soviets. When it fails to do so, Hitler announces that he's going to kill himself.

### 23 APRIL 2PM

**GENERAL WEIDLING APPOINTED**

With the Soviets closing in, Hitler appoints General Helmuth Weidling commander of the Berlin Defence Area.

### 24 APRIL 10AM

**9TH ARMY SURROUNDED**

General Busse's 9th Army, heading to Berlin after withdrawing from Seelow Heights, is encircled at Halbe. Trapped, the Soviets set about destroying it.

### 24 APRIL 9PM

**SECOND COUNTER-ATTACK**

General Wenck's 12th Army is pulled off the line facing US troops and sent to relieve the encircled 9th Army, an impossible task.

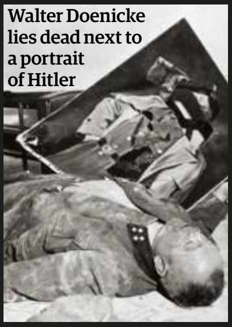
TSCHER VOLKSSTUR
WEHRMACHT

The Volkssturm militias, mostly made up of old men and schoolboys, were hastily trained and poorly equipped. Casualty rates reflected this

### 26 APRIL DAWN

**THE ONSLAUGHT ARRIVES**

About half a million Soviet troops swarm into Berlin. Fierce street fighting sees many buildings totally destroyed or damaged.


Walter Doenicke lies dead next to a portrait of Hitler

### 28 APRIL 3PM

**HIMMLER DISCUSSES SURRENDER**

Hitler learns that his most trusted ally, Himmler, has approached the Western Allies to discuss peace terms. Hitler declares him a traitor.

### 29 APRIL 5PM

**MOLTKE BRIDGE IS CAPTURED**

Demolition charges fail to properly destroy the last bridge over the Spree. It falls into Soviet hands.

### 30 APRIL 10AM

**WEIDLING'S LAST REPORT**

Weidling informs Hitler that the Soviets are just metres from his bunker, that the Reichstag is under fire and ammunition is nearly exhausted.

### 30 APRIL 3.30PM

**HITLER'S SUICIDE**

Hitler kills himself in the Führerbunker by simultaneously biting into a deadly cyanide capsule and shooting himself in the head. His body is cremated.

With nobody to bury the dead, corpses crowded the streets. About 400,000 people died during fighting in the city alone

his great rival Marshal Ivan Konev began to outflank the Germans from the south. The defensive position at Seelow fell on 19 April. About 12,000 of its defenders had been killed and the rest now fled. It had cost the Soviets more than double that and nearly 750 tanks, but there was now nothing left between them and Stalin's ultimate prize – Berlin.

Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front raced towards the city from the east and by 20 April was on its outskirts. Zhukov marked what was to be Hitler's final birthday by launching a huge artillery barrage against the city. Cowering in his Führerbunker, Der Führer, by now deranged and deluded, ranted wide-eyed about how the German people had betrayed him. If he was going to die, he shrieked, then they would die with him. The war was lost and Hitler knew it, but he'd make Berlin's 3 million inhabitants suffer terribly. The following day Zhukov's ground troops began their assault.

To the south, meanwhile, Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front was also making rapid progress. It had broken into open country and was chasing what was left of the German 9th Army. By now these German troops, who'd fought so bravely at Seelow, were slowly being encircled. They fled towards Berlin where there was still an opening in the front but on 24 April were halted at the town of Halbe. Not by Russians, however, but by SS troops holding the line there.

Mistaking the approaching Germans for a Soviet column, the SS opened up on them. The men from the 9th scurried for cover, and by the time the SS realised their mistake Konev's troops were swarming all over them, assaulting the SS defences. The 9th were trapped between the two sides and when fighting eased six days later 60,000 Germans lay dead.

The rest of the 1st Ukrainian Front swept forward, driving relentlessly towards Berlin. By nightfall it had made contact with Zhukov's troops west of the capital. With the 2nd Belorussian Front hemming the city in from the north, Berlin was now surrounded.

Hitler attempted a counter-offensive. He ordered the German 12th Army facing US troops in the west to smash through the Russian lines, link up with the beleaguered 9th and drive northward to Berlin. It was a wild gamble that had no chance of success. Halted 32 kilometres from the city, the 12th was soon forced back by overwhelming firepower.

The Russians now tightened the noose, and the siege that would engulf the city for the next two weeks reduced the once splendid capital to the inner circle of hell. The air became poisoned with the stench of burning buildings and rotting flesh, the streets busy with twisted corpses, the cellars and subways filled with untreated wounded. As the food ran out and the water supply dwindled, those in uniform ran amok. The civilian population was terrorised by both the Soviets – who hunted in packs for the city's females, raping whoever they found regardless of age or medical condition – and those supposedly defending them. By now the mask of respectability had slipped from the faces of those who wore the swastika, the Death's Head or SS lightning bolt badges. The slavering faces of the monsters beneath were revealed as they roamed the city in gangs murdering anyone they deemed cowardly or defeatist. The corpses of old men and children alike swung creaking from the city's scorched lampposts and trees.

A doomed last stand was prepared. General Helmuth Weidling, the man to whom Hitler had given the impossible task of defending the Nazi capital, established a defensive perimeter around the city centre. His 85,000-strong force, made up of literally the last men (and boys) standing, faced an onslaught from 500,000 Soviet troops.

In the early hours of 26 April, the final battle began. The streets quaked and crumbled as Soviet armour rumbled through them, while artillery and aircraft rained down fire from above. Every street was contested by infantry, with much of the fighting conducted house-to-house and hand-to-hand.

By 28 April, Tempelhof airport was in Soviet hands. There was now no way out, and the German lines were collapsing fast. The following evening, Soviet troops captured the Moltke Bridge over the River Spree, giving them direct access to the Nazi heart. Within hours they'd captured Gestapo headquarters. They were now a mere kilometre from the Reichstag and just 700 metres from Hitler's bunker.

Weidling delivered the news to Hitler on the morning of 30 April, also informing him that his garrison only had enough ammunition to

## SURRENDER AND PEACE

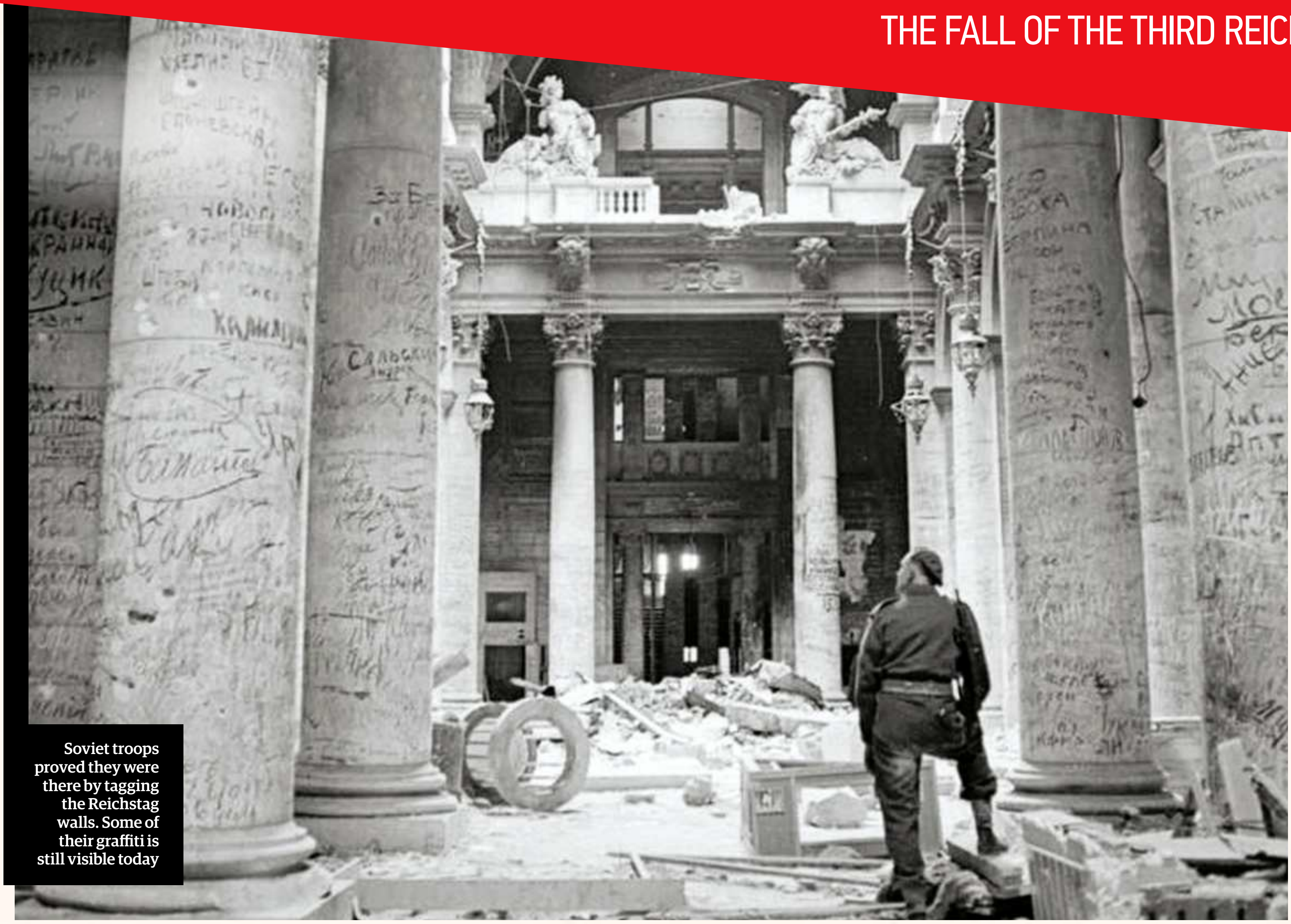
**After triggering the most devastating war in history, Germany finally signed a peace settlement that, in Europe at least, has truly kept the peace**

Although Weidling surrendered Berlin to the Russians on 2 May, effectively ending hostilities, Germany's official surrender didn't take place until six days later, on 8 May 1945, at a ceremony in the Soviet Military Administration in Berlin-Karlshorst.

This was actually the second act of surrender the German authorities signed. The first at the Western Allies HQ in France the day before was deemed unacceptable to the Soviets, who argued that the surrender should take place at the seat of the German Government. The terms of both documents, however, were the same – the surrender was to be unconditional, although Germany could expect to be treated a lot better than she had been in 1918.

Various German leaders, Himmler included, had earlier made several attempts to surrender conditionally to the Western Allies. But the condition was always the same – that the regime be allowed to continue its fight against the Soviet Union. To his credit Eisenhower refused to accept any of them. Like Roosevelt, he was a man of his word and he insisted Germany surrender to all the Allies – the USSR included – so that the war that had ravaged Europe for six long years could finally be brought to a close.

“THE SIEGE THAT WOULD ENGULF THE CITY FOR THE NEXT TWO WEEKS REDUCED THE ONCE SPLENDID CAPITAL TO THE INNER CIRCLE OF HELL”

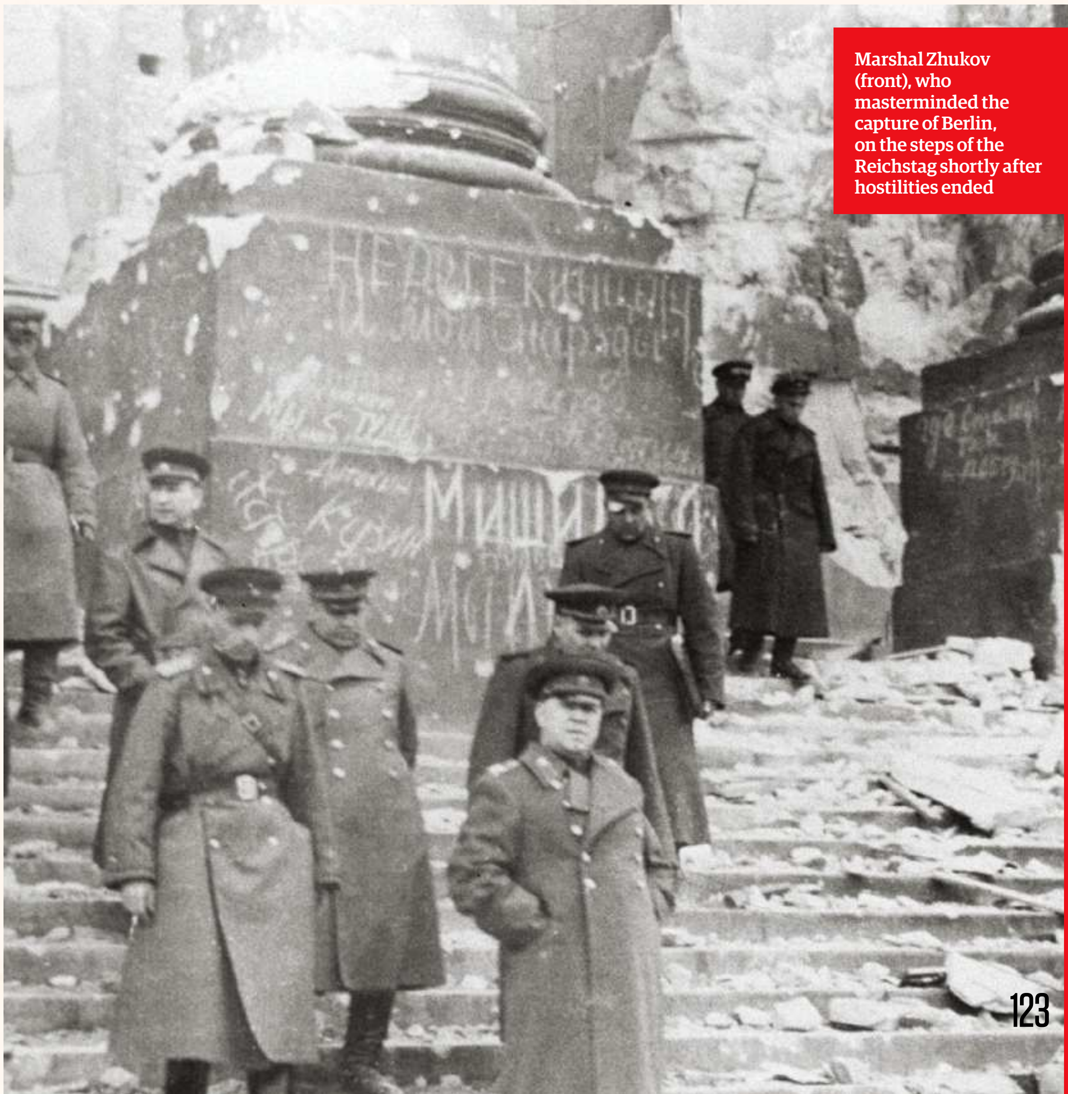


Soviet troops proved they were there by tagging the Reichstag walls. Some of their graffiti is still visible today

last 24 hours. He begged Der Führer to allow him to attempt a breakout, but there was to be no escape. Hitler dismissed Weidling's request and later that afternoon blew his own brains out. Whether or not this news would have persuaded the die-hard Nazis defending the Reichstag to surrender is doubtful. What isn't, though, is that many of the men the Soviets exterminated as they fought their way room by room, floor by floor, to the top of the building weren't actually German.

The voices the Soviets heard echoing along the burning corridors, in smoke-choked offices and even in the grand auditorium were French, Norwegian, Danish, Dutch and Latvian - members of the SS's various foreign legions, dying in the German capital while fighting for their twisted ideology. By 10.40pm that night, their own flag, the swastika, had been taken down from the roof of the Reichstag and replaced with the red flag of Soviet communism, the symbol of one defunct political ideology replaced by that of what would eventually be another.

The Battle of Berlin may have helped to finally end the carnage of World War II by crushing the remnants of the Wehrmacht, but it also marked the start of a new global conflict, one that would last for the next 45 years and stretch from Korea to Cuba and from Vietnam to Afghanistan. For it was in the rubble of the Reichstag that the Cold War was born.



Marshal Zhukov (front), who masterminded the capture of Berlin, on the steps of the Reichstag shortly after hostilities ended

# WHAT IF... THE NAZIS HADN'T GAINED POWER?

During the interwar years, Germany faced numerous crises but it was defined by progressive leadership and Hitler's rise was not guaranteed

### INTERVIEW WITH... ERIC WEITZ

Distinguished Professor of History at The City College of New York. Eric Weitz is also the author of *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* as well as *Creating German Communism, 1890-1990: From Popular Protests to Socialist State.*

**How was Germany run after Kaiser Wilhelm II was overthrown?**

In the last weeks [of World War I], a popular revolution began with sailors in the port of Kiel and it spread to industrial cities, then throughout the country. Throughout the winter of 1918 a revolution unfolds in Germany and like all revolutions it was very contested. On the radical end were workers, who established workers councils - soviets - in the factories, and this spread even to artistic realms, in theatres, and all through the country.

They were demanding a kind of radical democracy. Not really Bolshevik communism, but some kind of system in which workers would at least have influence over the economy. But the more moderate socialists, who were deathly afraid of 'Bolshevik chaos', as they called it, moved quickly to establish a parliamentary democracy.

The Social Democratic Party - the same party that we have today in Germany - in alliance with the liberal [German Democratic Party] and the Catholic Centre Party formed the Weimar Coalition. Their coalition prevailed at the election of January 1919 and then they empanelled a constitutional convention, which appointed a committee, that met in Weimar because of the civil war raging in Berlin. They drafted a constitution in summer 1919 and on that basis the Weimar Republic was created. This lasted until 30 January 1933, when Hitler was named chancellor.

**What was life like in 1920s Berlin?**

There was most definitely a lot going on. It was both tumultuous and crisis ridden, but at the same time it was one of the most creative eras of the 20th century. Perhaps there is a relationship between the two - we can never prove it - but the fragility of the political order, I think, contributed to the kind of artistic ferment that is still with us today. Particularly in the cities - Berlin of course was the centre - there was vital artistic experimentation going on.

Here we have the creation of artistic modernism; expressionism in painting and theatre; very creative film, the new popular medium of the 1920s; radio also. Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*, Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's *The Threepenny Opera* - all of these incredibly innovative and creative works emerged in the Weimar Republic.

There was a lively cabaret scene, again in the cities, a very lively public life with people out in the streets. They were having very open discussions about sexuality.

I sometimes laugh when people in the United States say discussing sexuality is so new, when Germans were having them [talks] in the 1920s.

**So it was very socially progressive?**

Quite vibrantly so! There were discussions about homosexuality and pressures to reform Germany's

In the wake of the 1918-19 German Revolution, political factions vied for power

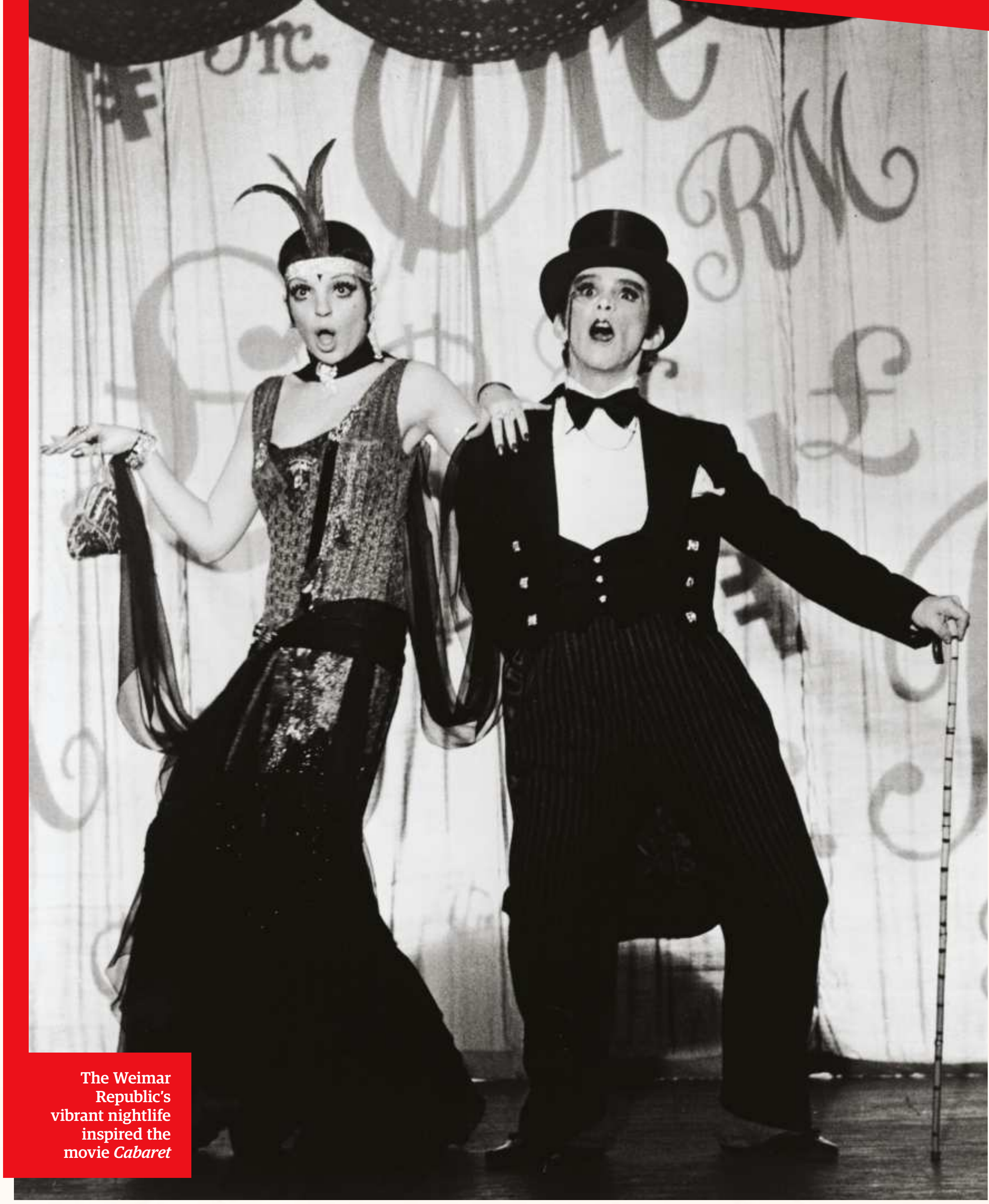
highly restrictive abortion law. They also set up public health clinics that offered counselling about sex. The Weimar constitution was probably the most democratic constitution anywhere in the world in the 1920s. Proportional representation, which ultimately contributed to the paralysis of the political system, was far more democratic than the American system of winner-takes-all. The security services sometimes responded brutally to public demonstrations, but in general there was a lively free press and freedom of assembly.

Jewish life also flourished - another sign of openness. There was still some prejudice, and areas like the Officer Corps were closed off to Jewish applicants. But it was possible for Jews to get university professorships.

**How did right-wing groups such as the Nazi Party gain ground?**

In the early 1920s, you have literally hundreds of extreme right-wing organisations. Many of them were very small and local, but they were also troublesome. These groups were by and large demobilised soldiers, let go under the armistice conditions and the final Versailles Peace Treaty.

These demobilised soldiers were aghast at the prevalence of socialists and communists in public spaces and leading government - as well as Jews in high-level positions. In 1919 the Jewish social democratic chancellor of Bavaria, Kurt Eisner, was assassinated. In 1922 the Jewish banker and intellectual, Foreign Minister Walter Rathenau, was killed. So there was a lot of right-wing terrorism going on, carried out by these small groups. The Nazis eventually unified these groups under the Nazi Party - that was one of their first accomplishments. In 1923, when hyperinflation completely disrupted economic and social life, these right-wing groups grew in size and the Nazis



The Weimar Republic's vibrant nightlife inspired the movie *Cabaret*

## HOW WOULD IT BE DIFFERENT?

### REAL TIMELINE

**Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicates**
Following the Kiel Mutiny, a revolution spreads through Germany. Kaiser Wilhelm II is forced to abdicate and the Weimar Republic emerges.
**9 November 1918**

**The Great Depression**
Reliant on American loans under the Dawes Plan, the Wall Street Crash has a devastating effect on Germany. Politicians struggle to find a meaningful solution.
**29 October 1929**

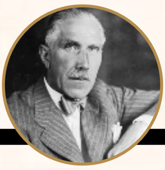
**Political chaos**
Three governments collapse in Germany in 1932, with Chancellor Brüning resigning, Franz von Papen failing to win votes and Schleicher's regime lasting two months.
**1932**

**Hitler appointed chancellor**
On the advice of Franz von Papen and several colleagues, President Hindenburg abandons his opposition to Adolf Hitler and appoints him as the new chancellor of Germany.
**30 January 1933**

**Hitler given new powers**
The German parliament – controlled by a Nazi coalition with other right-wing parties – votes to make itself redundant by passing the Enabling Act, allowing Hitler to rule by decree alone.
**23 March 1933**

### ALTERNATE TIMELINE

**The Nazi Party collapses**
Though the Nazis were the largest party in the fractured parliament, they still only had 33 per cent of the vote. Dissatisfied with Hitler's leadership, an attempted coup leads to a schism and ultimately the dissolution of the party.
**1933**



**Von Papen returns**
With Hitler no longer a tenable option for chancellor and with limited alternatives, President Hindenburg appoints his old friend Franz von Papen to the post once again.
**30 January 1933**

made their first attempt to seize power [in the failed Munich Beer Hall Putsch].

**So after the hyperinflation in 1923, was the Nazi Party's rise inevitable?**

Actually, between 1924-29, the so-called 'golden years' of the Weimar Republic, there was a move back to the political centre. You see it in the elections of 1928 when both the extreme right and extreme left lose significant support. The Nazis in 1928 are a small party; they're a police problem, but they're not really a political threat. Hitler has been banned from speaking in many of the German states. They're really nowhere until 1929 when the Great Depression hits and that then gives wind - I mean a thunderstorm, a hurricane force of wind - to the Nazi sails. But even in the 1930 elections, the Nazis got slaughtered, with only 18 per cent of the vote. It was a massive shock. The highest vote they would ever get in a popular election was 37.4 per cent in July 1932. Now that's a large chunk to be sure, but it's not a majority and that's significant because they never had a majority. You know, before the Third Reich, they never had a majority of popular support.

**If the Nazis were polling so badly, how did Hitler become chancellor of Germany in 1933?**

There is a popular understanding that the German people let Hitler into power, but that's absolutely wrong. So all through 1932, while the economy keeps falling, the political system has completely fragmented. There are three major elections in the course of 1932: two parliamentary elections and one presidential election. The biggest electoral turnout the Nazi Party gets is 37.4 per cent. In November 1932 they lose again and this time are down to 32 per cent. There is serious discontent within the Nazi Party about Hitler's leadership, and I think it is possible to imagine the dissolution of the party.

However, in the end, in January 1933 a group of alpha men, bankers, army officers, high public servants - including Franz von Papen, Kurt von Schleicher and the president's own son, Oskar von Hindenburg - prevail upon Hindenburg to name Hitler chancellor. So in the very end it's a small group of powerful men around the president who are responsible for the Nazis coming to power.

**Why did these figures want to help Hitler?**

Their motives were to destroy the republic and replace it with some kind of conservative authoritarian system and to overthrow the Versailles Peace Treaty so that Germany could become a great power again. Basically you have a coalition of interests between older, more traditional conservatives and the Nazis. Each side is using the other, but the conservatives find that they cannot actually contain the Nazis. Not at all.

**If the Nazis had dissolved or Hindenburg had maintained his opposition to Hitler, could the Weimar Republic have survived?**

The optimistic assessment would be that the Weimar coalition parties would gradually win more support, people would come back to the centre and you would have a viable social democratic parliamentary government in Germany, as we were getting in Sweden in the same period in the 1930s.

But when the Great Depression comes, it hits Germany so fast and it affects it more than any other place. At the same time, the Social Democrats were exhausted and the political system fragments and becomes essentially unworkable. Even before the Nazis seize power, the president signed emergency orders one after the other to issue budgets, to pursue his deflationary policy, which only served to worsen the economy.

**In either scenario, without Hitler, was World War II still inevitable?**

I think World War II was inevitable when the Nazis came to power, but I don't think it would have been with a conservative group in power. It would have still been a nasty military dictatorship probably, but they would have been far more cautious. We know that because the conservatives thought Hitler was too radical with his moves into the Rhineland in 1936 and Czechoslovakia in 1938 - they're much more cautious and don't support those measures.

Hitler united Germany's various far-right groups under a single banner

**Night of the Long Knives**
In a bloody purge of the SA leadership and Hitler's political rivals, von Papen narrowly escapes with his life.
**30 June 1934**

**Nuremberg Laws**
Hitler announces new measures that establish apartheid in Germany, with Jews losing their civil rights and becoming second-class citizens.
**15 September 1935**

**Reoccupying the Rhineland**
Hitler marches 20,000 German troops into the Rhineland, directly contravening the Treaty of Versailles.
**7 March 1936**

**Buchenwald opens**
SS authorities open the Buchenwald concentration camp. The following year, almost 10,000 Jews are sent here.
**16 July 1937**

**Kristallnacht pogrom**
Joseph Goebbels leads an attack against German and Austrian Jews, which is called the 'Night of the Broken Glass' after the devastation it causes, including piles of smashed shop windows.
**9 November 1938**

**World War II declared**
Following the invasion of Poland two days before and Hitler's refusal to withdraw, Britain and France declare war on Nazi Germany.
**3 September 1939**

**Reichstag Fire**
When Van der Lubbe is charged with burning down the Reichstag building von Papen seizes on this opportunity, arresting communist leaders.
**27 February 1933**

**Election victory**
With widespread anti-communist feeling and votes from former Nazi supporters, von Papen's Centre Party wins at a general election.
**5 March 1933**

**Authoritarian democracy**
With a mandate to govern, von Papen passes ultra-conservative laws and perhaps even seeks to reform the constitution.
**1934**

**Military dictatorship**
Advocating the seizure of power as early as November 1932, von Papen exploits Hindenburg's death to combine the chancellorship and presidency.
**2 August 1934**

**Renegotiate Versailles**
While von Papen would not risk starting a war, he would strengthen the military to force Britain and France back to the negotiating table.
**1936**

**Peace for our time?**
War-weary Britain and France allow Germany to annex Czechoslovakia in return for von Papen de-escalating his military build up.
**1938**

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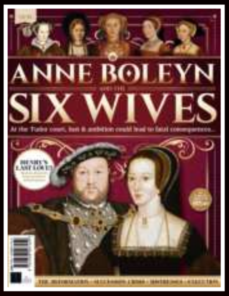
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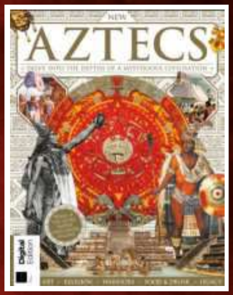

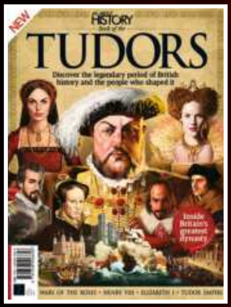
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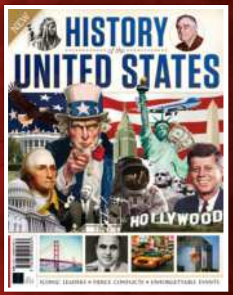
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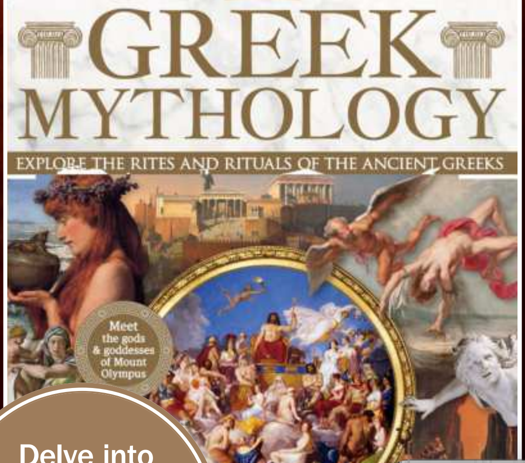
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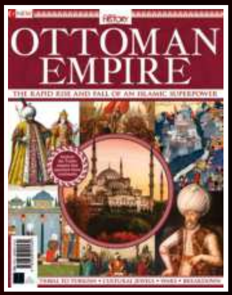
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